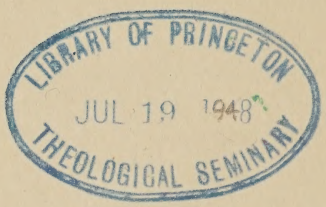
CHRIST AS AUTHORITY

CONRAD BERGENDOFF



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CHRIST AS AUTHORITY

by

CONRAD BERGENDOFF

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Chapter I

Christ as Authority

The most fateful problem of our generation is the question of authority. "Whom shall we follow?" or "Whom shall we obey?" These are the most fundamental of our inquiries, unless perchance some might inquire if really we need to follow or obey anyone at all.

But at least for the majority of mankind until our own day there have existed authorities who have been the guides of human thought and action. The individual has felt himself too insignificant, too uncertain, to strike boldly out on a course of his own, regardless of consequences. Man's seemingly innate impulse to join a group or a party is an illustration of his inadequacy to form his own conclusions. Even the great independent thinkers have arrived at their positions by reactions to their fellow men, and by some intuitive perception that they were

themselves following some one or some thing outside themselves. The very word "authority" suggests an "author," a force or power that compels action by those over whom authority extends.

At the present moment the problem seems most acute at the level of international relationships. Above the national state there is no recognized superior. The state is an absolute sovereign, and its people acknowledge no power before which the state must yield except the power of superior military might. But in the fear that some other nation may impose its power over us we confess that the state is not absolute. The state is our defense against what we fear as absolute, namely military might, the power of some other more mighty nation to set up authority over us. We are struggling to bend all such military might under the authority of law. We would rather submit ourselves to the authority of law, but we admit that it can not be national law, it must be international, even universal in scope. In any case, whatever the ultimate form which international authority may assume, we are not

free, either as individuals or as nations. We must obey some superior power, some force outside of and beyond us.

Four centuries ago the question was on the level of the individual. To a very great extent Luther's struggle was concerned about authority. He had accepted the commonly held opinion that the papal church was the supreme authority. What the church held and taught and enjoined, each Christian in every Roman see was to accept without question. Any student of history knows that from the very beginning change and strife marked the course of the Christian community. Implied in every change is a criticism of what has existed. There never was a time when all men in the church unquestioningly accepted what the authorities in the hierarchy prescribed. The authorities themselves were constantly engaged in maintaining themselves as authorities. But from the time of Gregory at least, at the end of the sixth century, Western civilization bowed to the Papacy and its courts. The church was the authority over

the spirit of man, and most men were satisfied to have it so.

History has pretty well concluded that Luther was the man who first effectually broke this suzerainty of the church over the souls of men. He was not the first who contended with this dominant authority. The story of the heresies and the Inquisition precedes the sixteenth century. But Luther set himself against the hierarchy at a junction of events and in a way that did permanently change the course of human thought and human obedience to authority. It was not his castigation of the princely power of the pontiff, violent and powerful as this was, that shook the throne in St. Peter's. Before him German emperors and French kings had attacked more disastrously the temporal power of the Papal State. Nor was it the blows aimed at a corrupt clergy, who all over Europe had discredited the gospel they professed and proclaimed, that broke their hold on the common people. For centuries saints within the Roman Church had bitterly decried, and sinners without the pale had scoffed at the profligate and

mercenary monks whom numerous rules had failed to reform. But when Luther questioned the right of the church to effect the forgiveness of sins by sacrifices and ordinances of its own making, he struck at the very roots of the institution in which men of the Middle Ages had taken refuge.

The authority of the church lay in its claim to change the status of man before the judgment seat of God. Relying on the treasury of its saints, its access to the throne through the Virgin, its power to perform the sacrifice of the Mass, and its tradition-borne prestige as the successor to Peter, the papal church had held a sway over the hearts of the peoples of Europe, converted from paganism through the devoted labors of noble missionaries, that some thought would be as lasting as the earth itself. Luther, at times, was not unwilling to let the Roman precedence continue. But all the strength and vehemence of his robust soul went into his determined opposition to the kind of spiritual authority which Rome claimed for itself. He recognized the need for order, for guidance, for education and

assistance. But man can help only up to a certain point in the salvation of his fellow man. Beyond that point no individual or institution can profit the soul of man. *Sola Gratia* and *Sola Fide* are Luther's irrevocable challenge to the spiritual supremacy of any human authority over the individual. Nothing that the church can do is enough to save a single soul, and it is a false claim the church makes when she leads men to think that she is an absolute sovereign or a final authority. There is no vicar of Christ on earth worthy of the name, no one can take His place. The authority which the church possesses is not the authority to reign in His stead.

The authority which Luther recognized as final was none less than Christ Himself. He was ready to give thanks for the church that offered the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. But Word and Sacraments were not the goal or the authority, even though some of Luther's followers seem to have stopped there. To Luther these means brought man into the presence of Christ. He is the supreme sovereign of the Christian. And the purpose of the life, death,

and resurrection of Christ is "that I might be His, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity."

When men speak of Luther's spiritual experience as a declaration of independence of modern man they may be less than half correct. Independence of a hierarchical institution he did declare. But that was only the negative aspect of his work. And that experience of liberation is not a justification of modern liberalism which sees all truth in the mere fact of experience, or in the independence of the human soul to the point of spiritual autonomy. It is not Luther's experience per se, as a religious phenomena, which is significant. The importance lies in *what* he experienced, the object of his experience. Luther broke with the Roman Church. So did others who have not thereby much benefited their fellow men. We may even doubt if breaking away from Rome in order to set up spiritual autonomy has been altogether a profitable change. Luther's signal contribution to following

generations of Christians has been the transfer of allegiance from a human authority to the authority of the Word God has spoken in Christ. By Word I do not mean only a written or spoken word, but Word in the sense of the ever-living presence of Christ in the fellowship of believers.

> "The Word they still shall let remain,
> Nor any thanks have for it;
> He's by our side, upon the plain,
> With His good gifts and Spirit."

Our own day stands in need of a clearer demarcation of the locus of authority in Christian experience. There are plenty of people to whom Christianity seems to mean only allegiance to a book, or to a church, or to an ideal way. Critics there are who wonder that in this day even such can command the devotion of modern men. They would echo the words of Edmond Scherer,[1] "the fundamental dogma of intolerance is that there are dogmas, that of tolerance, that there are only opinions." Their opposition to anything fixed or certain is not with them, however, merely an opinion. It is a religion or at least a philosophy, and has been well formulated by John Dewey:[2]

"If one stops to consider the matter, is there not, he asks, something strange in the fact that men should consider loyalty to 'laws,' principles, standards, ideals to be an inherent virtue, accounted unto them for righteousness? It is as if they were making up for some secret sense of weakness by rigidity and intensity of insistent attachment. A moral law, like a law in physics, is not something to swear by and stick to at all hazards. It is a formula of the way to respond when specified conditions present themselves. Its soundness and pertinence are tested by what happens when it is acted upon. Its claim or authority rests finally upon the imperativeness of the situation that has to be dealt with, not upon its own intrinsic nature, as any tool achieves dignity in the measure of needs served by it."

Principles, standards, ideals, thus are only tools or formulas by which to meet life's dilemmas. Moral laws are not to be followed at all hazards, but experimented with, to see what happens. There are few more revealing sentences in modern literature, to my knowledge, that so clearly describe modern man's attitude.

Judged by such a formula all Christian respect for authority is a delusion.

But the Christian cause is not served by setting up against experimental empiricism any secondary principles or loyalties. Sometimes these are elevated to the place of primary authority, and Christianity becomes distorted in the minds both of friend and foe. Thus, Christianity is not faith in the Bible. The Bible does reveal Christ, without the Bible we could not know Him. The Bible tells us how He comes to us, walking over the waves of our own storm-filled lives. But to say, "I believe in the Bible," is not the same as to say, "I believe in Christ." Much ink has been wasted, many tempers have been spoiled in argument on theories of inspiration. No man was ever saved by any theory of inspiration, nor condemned by such. Salvation is by Christ. When we know Him, we reverence the pages which are as a cradle containing Him. Plenty of people do homage to orthodox theories of how God wrote the Bible but have never heard Him speak to their consciences. It is Christ that matters in Scripture. Christianity is

not a religion of a book. It is a religion of a Living Word.

Christianity is not faith in the church. If by church we mean a building, of course none can put his trust in wood or stone. If by church we mean a congregation, we can rejoice in its fellowship, but how can our fellow worshipers save us? Or is the church a communion of men and women of all lands and ages? Our belonging to it can give us inspiration, but this unseen throng is not the object of our faith. Only One there is who transfigures with His radiance every Christian fellowship. He is Christ. Until we have found Him there nothing else can long sustain us. When we have found Him, we realize that the church does not uphold Him, He upholds the church. His Presence makes the church. If He is not present in our lives, nothing in the church can fill the void.

Christianity is not a way of life. We can form our habits, make them as respectable as we will, fulfill our obligations and lead a worthy life, and yet be unknown of Him. Adding virtues or multiplying good deeds do not make a Christian.

No self-made man was ever a Christian. For Christians are Christ-made men. Each one of them is a miracle, created anew by Him, who is no way of life alone, but who alone is Life. It is necessary for us to go and sell all that we have if we are to follow Him, because of the well-nigh overpowering temptation to put our trust in something we have. All our virtues and all our possessions are as toys which we hug to ourselves. But when He appears, His presence shows them to be toys. When He speaks we hear a word that drowns out all the confused noises of earthly temptations. Christianity is not a way, it is a walking with Christ.

The ultimate authority, then, is not a set of propositions, nor a fellowship, nor a system of ethics. When we seek to set these up as the standards for Christians to follow we are back in the Middle Ages again. For Protestant theology and philosophy and worship and codes may be as much of a barrier to true Christianity as medieval traditions were obstacles in Luther's way to Christ. We can not summon the men and women of our generation to follow us in our

thought or customs, and call that Christianity. For as teachers of our own conceptions we are but scribes. John Tauler long ago drew a picture of the scribes of all generations:[3] "By the scribes we may understand men of a reasoning turn of mind, who try all things by the light of their reason, or as they appear to them through their senses. They receive ideas by means of their senses, and then exercise upon them their powers of reflection that they may attain to the comprehension of high questions. And they glory therein, and make very lofty discourses, but in the inward parts, where pure truth should gush forth from its fount, they are empty and dry, yielding nothing."

All our lofty discourses yield nothing because we are but exercising our powers of reflection upon our sense experience, the very method of the empiricist. The authority of our opinions is insufficient for men seeking the truth. Our highest service can but be to point them to the Person of Christ. Not to Christology, nor even to Christianity, but to Christ Himself. Not a dead Christ, not a remote Christ, but a living, present, active,

purposing, suffering, achieving Christ. A Christ risen from the dead, and so alive. A Christ Incarnate, enmeshed in our difficulties, sins, and possibilities. The supreme authority of our faith as Christians is the author of that faith, "Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who . . . endured the cross, . . . and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12. 2).

If Christ had not come there would have been no Bible, no church, no Christian manner of life. Yet men have succeeded in interpreting the Bible as if He were not come or now continuing His work. They have built church fellowships without Him, and constructed systems of ethics leaving Him out. No wonder that the authority of these pretenders to the throne wanes and is disputed. We need to be brought back into the hearing of the compelling voice of Christ, whose Word is not bound by the leather covers of a book but is a two-edged sword cutting into the heart of our time and age. There is a contemporary Christ who is the same today as He was

yesterday and will be in time to come. His voice commands attention and response.

Kierkegaard[4] concerned himself intensively with this problem of the contemporaneity of Christ. He was battling against the age-old tendency to make of Christianity a thing of history, a series of facts and happenings which can be historically verified so as to become the basis of faith. But Kierkegaard saw clearly that faith in historical facts is not Christianity. All the efforts of historical research to re-create the past so as to tell us what certainly happened can not automatically produce faith in Christ. For even those who lived in Galilee and Jerusalem in the days of Jesus did not therefore believe. It is no easier, nor harder, to believe now than then. The element of time does not explain Christian faith. Kierkegaard even asserts that we should in imagination sweep aside the 1848 years that divided his generation from Christ and come face to face with Christ. Then the decision of faith would be imperative. Before Him we must say either "Yes," or "No." The authority of Christ rests on a timeless, changeless character in Him which

is something quite different from our endorsement of historical records.

Certainly the situation has not greatly changed in the century that has elapsed since Kierkegaard. If anything, historical interest has grown, without a corresponding growth in religious, Christian faith. We are still seeking for truth in the archaeological remains of Palestine. We have discovered that the writers of the Bible, as all writers, had a purpose in their work. *Geschichte* is *Formgeschichte*. We know more about the times in which Jesus lived, in and out of Palestine, than the disciples themselves knew of their day. We have related Jesus to His world. Yet who would claim that thereby we know Him as they knew Him who became His witnesses? Are we not in the crowd of those who say, "Is not this the carpenter's Son? Is not His mother called Mary? and His brethren, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?" (Matthew 13. 55–6). We have all the historical evidence. Yet we ask, "Whence His authority?" Neither the

denial nor the affirmative of the evidence is the central thing. Indeed our use of the evidence depends on the deeper question, "Do we believe in Him?"

This is not to say that the historical records are not of great importance. Kierkegaard would not admit that Christ could be known or believed without them. It is not here a matter of substituting some mystical apprehension of Christ outside of or beyond the Scriptures. For Kierkegaard it was a very crucial matter that we meet the Christ of the Gospels, the kind of a Christ in whom men took offense. The peril of mysticism is that men conjure up out of the depths of their own subconscious being the Christ they think they have found. The Christ of the Gospels is not one ever desired by man, nor created by man's imagination. In the very fact that He differs from what men expected the Messiah to be lies a guarantee that He is not a human product. The New Testament, even pages of the Old Testament, delineate Him "as one from whom men hide their face" (Isaiah 53), and as a stumbling block and foolishness

to the wisdom of this world. Indeed, then, the record of His incarnation is indispensable and regulatory. But faith in the record is not identical with faith in Him. We can understand the letters of the Book. Faith in Christ requires an experience in the heart which is more than intellectual.

If we go back, beyond both Kierkegaard and Luther, to the New Testament itself, we shall find Paul giving an answer that may needs be re-emphasized in our own day. To our knowledge Paul never saw Jesus before the crucifixion. We know from his own description how the Lord first appeared to him. There is nothing in Paul's letters or preaching that leads us to believe that he considered it necessary for every follower of Christ to have a vision such as his in order to understand the authority of the Lord. We do not therefore take his experience as normative. But in his writings, when he has in mind the average Christians of the congregations of the church, he very clearly refers to a presence of Christ which is available to every believer. It is the Risen Christ who is in the midst of His

people whom faith apprehends and follows. When the Christian has had his eyes opened to the revelation of God he confesses that he is no longer his own, but his authority is Christ, with whom he has been raised into a new sphere of life.

Here is an immediacy, in point of time, that has been too often dimmed in succeeding generations of Christians, who have been inclined to make a doctrine of Christ, or an institution of His followers, their basis of fellowship. Paul's description of what happens to the believer leaves no doubt that the present tense must be used in that description. In his Epistle to the Ephesians a remarkable parallelism exists between what God has done in Christ and what God does in the believer. By "the strength of his might" God "wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1. 19–21). That is a reference, of course,

to the resurrection and the exaltation of Christ. But a Christian does not simply acknowledge and accept that as a fact of history. "And you," Paul goes on, "did he make alive when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein ye once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air (cf., "rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name . . . , not only in this world, but also in that which is to come"), of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; . . . God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, *made us alive together with Christ . . . ,* and *raised us up with him,* and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus" (2. 1–6).

The same thought is expressed in the Epistle to the Romans: "Like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. . . . But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more! death no

more hath dominion over him. . . . Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof: . . . but present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6. 4–14). There is a relationship between the resurrection of Christ and the life of the Christian which begins at the very start of Christian experiences. We err when we refer the significance of Christ's resurrection to a period beyond our own graves. Christian faith and life are a creation of God in this stage of our experience, and we are now raised up to dwell with Him. His is the dominion and power, hence He is our authority.

When therefore we speak of the authority of Christ it can mean nothing less than the authorship of faith in the Christian by a meeting between Him and the believer which results in a personal decision. Kierkegaard's phrase of "a disciple at second hand" well describes a multitude of those in today's churches. They have heard tell of Christ but they have no direct ex-

perience of His power. Kierkegaard, however, would deny that they are Christians. Certainly we may admit that the churches today are weak and unauthoritative because they lack the strong conviction of men and women who can say with Paul that they died with Him and now live in His resurrection grace. Rather the picture of our day is that of the terrified disciples huddled together in an obscure room mourning the fact that He is dead. Or of the confused disciples who confessed that "we hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel" (Luke 24. 21), but now can not understand what became of Him. We are lacking the joyous confidence of men and women who know that He is risen from the dead past and living in the trials of the present moment so that He can create world-conquering faith in the hearts of those who live in His presence.

Chapter II

The Appeal to Scripture

Any attempt to define rigorously the place of the Bible in the faith of a Christian is doomed to failure. One would have to write the history of Christianity to comprehend all the different attitudes of believers toward the Scripture, and be prepared in all cases to judge what has been the right use and what the abuse of the Book as an authority. It is easy to say that one believes in the Bible, or one does not. It is difficult to analyze *what* one believes, and what significance that belief has in the life of the believer. Nor does it help much to refer to the doctrines of the churches for a statement of the meaning of Scripture in the life of Christians. For it is notorious how almost every teaching has been referred to the Bible, and there is always the unanswered question as to the authority of the church in defining the authority of the Book.

Yet something should be clear after two thousand years of Christian history. The contours of the experiences of all the generations of Christians are discernible to the pilgrim who would find the path that leads to assurance. Bypaths and dead-end roads have been pretty well explored, and it is possible to tell where certain ways of using Scripture have led. Our purpose is not to lay down rules of interpretation or laws of assent, but to describe something of the need of the Christian for the Book, and something of the experience of Christians when they appeal to the Scriptures. Like the man born blind who had his sight restored by Jesus, Christians may not be able to explain what has happened in their reading of Scripture. When confronted by the judgment of some that the Bible is but another book, as some considered Jesus only as another sinful mortal, the answer in both cases is the same, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9. 25). What we have come to see in Scripture is for us the real ground of the authority of Scripture, beside which claims and counterclaims are of minor

importance. If nothing remarkable has been found there, no assertion of ecclesiastics will give to the Book any real power.

The modern attitude of doubt is a curious mingling of lack of faith both in the Book and in the church. The two have of course in all ages been inextricably interwoven. The argument still goes on whether church or Bible was first. In part a confusion of terms is responsible. Undoubtedly there was an oral word before there was a written, and a community of believers was necessary for the collection of the books and the determination of the canon. But most will agree that the divine Word was primary. It created the community of believers, which in turn preserved the message which created it. The trouble began when the community of believers came to think of itself as in some peculiar fashion a custodian of the divine revelation, and used the power of the keys to its earthly advantage and prestige. The Reformation of the sixteenth century is only one event of a long series wherein men have rebelled against an institutionalizing church seeking to make capital of revelation.

Modern unbelief is at least as much a lack of faith in the church as in the Scripture. So often in the past the churches have used the Bible to bolster up their own power that a feeling of suspicion is abroad. Outside of the churches is a group whose real size can not be known, who profess a certain faith in the Old or New Testament, or in fact the whole Bible, but who fear the organized ministry and congregations, claiming that these do not rightly represent the fellowship of faith.

On the other hand, there are doubtless large numbers within the congregations who give allegiance to the churches but pay little attention to the Word. Enough for them that the keys of heaven are in the hands of the ministry, who alone are competent to know the will of God. For them salvation depends on a routine prescribed by established authority, and they are in no position to analyze the way the authority became established. Questions or doubts do not disturb them, for they concern themselves little with inquiry. Only dimly, if at all, are they aware that they are in the church for a number

of reasons other than religious: tradition, family, social, sometimes even financial. To what extent their church depends on Scripture they do not know, nor have they often themselves recourse to it. They have found refuge in the branches of the tree of life but are not a part of the life of the tree.

Despite all protestations to the contrary churches have at times gotten along and ahead without Scripture. As institutions supporting law and order they have enjoyed the favor of kings and governments, and had their place in society secured by privilege and sometimes the sword. It was to the church as a possible means of saving society in the dark days of pagan corruption that emperors turned with hope and with help.[1] When the second Roman Empire crashed princes again looked to churches for aid in reconstituing society, and in both papal and Protestant countries, church and state entered into alliances to preserve themselves. Nor are signs lacking today that political authorities recognize the value of religious organizations to maintain morals and morale within a nation.

This is not to say that churches have sold their heritage necessarily for the mess of pottage the governments can offer. But none can gainsay that the temptations are insidious and numerous, and too often they have proved too strong. Churches have become legal bodies and tended to derive their strength from the same sources as make for strength in political bodies. They have not consciously rejected the Scriptures as the source of their own life, but often they have made of Scripture a code of belief and behavior, comparable to political codes, and exercised over their members a sway not very different from that of governmental authorities. Between state church and free church there has been no great distinction in this regard, for the legalistic character of church discipline has been as evident in one camp as the other. In both Scripture has been set up as ultimate authority, but in both Scripture has been treated as a means toward an end, namely, the preservation of the church, however conceived. Belief in the Bible has been a requisite of membership in the church, but membership in the church has not always been

interpreted as the means to a fuller acceptance of the Bible.

Suggestive of the tendency of the churches to institutionalize themselves and to follow secular patterns in the exercise of power is the fact that in the pages of church history large space is devoted to names such as Constantine and Charlemagne, Hildebrand and Charles V, Henry VIII and Cromwell, Frederick the Wise and Gustavus Adolphus. Some of these in name or in deed assumed the title of *summus episcopus* and many lesser potentates have claimed spiritual jurisdiction over the flock of God. Even more incongruous is the circumstance that some of the confessions of the churches have been supported by the use of threat of force. Military might is not too far in the background of the forces undertaking to maintain the decisions of the Council of Trent, or the Augsburg or Westminster Confessions, the decrees of Dort, or even the constitution of colonial Massachusetts. In the reading of church history the student will find that in all generations there have been many who while proclaiming faith in the Bible never

have dared to let the church depend on this as its sole defense and source of strength.

Yet to one who reads not to scoff, the history of Christianity will afford sufficient testimony that the sustaining power and the creative force have always come from Scripture. In captivity and Diaspora the people of the Old Testament lived by the promise of Psalmist and prophet. Out of the vine nourished by Gospels and Epistles grew the sturdy tree from which Roman emperors sought to fashion tool and weapon to defend their state. The real fountains of strength in the Middle Ages were not those in Vatican and Quirinal, but in the hills of Assisi, among the Brethren of the Common Life in the Low Countries, on the missionary frontiers and in the cells of monastic devotion. Luther and Calvin and Wesley and Zinzendorf are the truly enduring personalities, and the source of their strength lay hid in the realm of the Word. Modern secular history has departed from the older custom of interpreting the record of nations by the consideration of a few notable persons, and seeks now to find the key to events in the history of

the broad, undistinguished masses. So the writers of church history might well look below the surface of ecclesiastical pomp and ceremony and monument, and find the roots of Christian growth in the obscure men and women who in the Scriptures have found a power transforming their own existence, and more than they know changing the history of the world. Prayer and hymn and simple reading of the Word are the effective forces in Christian history, though the superficial historian may never deign to look into this humble region for the illumination of his theme.

Strange, but little is heard in these really significant quarters of the controversy over inspiration of the written page. That is reserved for the learned, who argue about the faith of others. Or it is left to the legalists who insist that men shall say, "The Bible is the Word of God," even if its pages are never opened. But in all ages there have been those who have read these books of Old and New Testament, and found upon the pages an unearthly glow, and heard in the recesses of their soul a heavenly voice speaking.

The decisions of church councils concerning canon and doctrine are not truths revealed from heaven to these learned bodies, but the attempt of schoolmen to try to describe the effect believers have experienced as they listened to the Word. No divine vision led the early church to decide which writings were to form a New Testament. Out of the corporate experience of a fellowship of believers came a conviction as they read the Epistles or heard the Gospels, that this is not the teaching of man. "Surely," they felt, "this is holy ground, holy writ, for we have seen a vision of God and heard Him speak to us." And all the following experience of believers have corroborated their witness. Else these writings would have gone the way of other works of men, even of classical writers whose books today are unknown. Some irresistible power there is in these unassuming accounts of events of long ago, to thrill the hearts of searchers for the truth and cause them to explain, "We have found Him."

The formula, "The Bible is the Word of God," is as meaningless as that other assertion,

"This is my Body," except there be in each case an experience of the presence of Him who creates a world out of chaos, and a clean heart and a new spirit out of human sin and unbelief. The church can never force men to believe in either formula. It can not adduce proof to convince men against their wills. It can bear witness that multitudes have found this book to be the Word of God as no other writing of man has ever become. But little is won until the Scripture has penetrated to the inner eye and its meaning has dawned on a heart turned from stone to flesh. Even the Commandments inscribed on Sinai's tablets remain cold and hard until they be rewritten within the heart by a spirit whose voice has become an inner guide and teacher.

In the history of Christian doctrine one of the difficult chapters is the controversy over the "two natures" of Christ. Some have asserted His humanity, others His divinity. The church has judged that He is both, hard though it be for the human mind to comprehend this seeming contradiction. Much of the argument can be applied to the doctrine of the Word. The Bible is

human. It bears the marks of human authorship. It is a product of historical events and circumstances. To some it is as easily explained as was Christ by certain contemporaries. Was He not "the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know" (John 6. 42). The Bible can be explained relatively. But such explanation has never sufficed. Baffled on its seat of judgment, human reason has cried out, "What art Thou?" And down through the ages men and women have witnessed, "This is the Word of God." Something else there is than words of history, wisdom, and consolation. As the disciples dared affirm, "Thou art the Son of God," as they learned to know Him whom the generations have not yet fathomed, so their disciples could say of the writings that revealed Him as in their midst that herein they heard the voice of God. No more than the theologians have been able to draw the dissecting line between the two natures of Christ have they been able to determine the extent of the human and the divine in the books called the Bible. As He the Son of God became incarnate in human form to the point

even of "emptying Himself" of His eternal glory, so the Word, for all its human characteristics, is an incarnation of a power of God which speaks to the heart and creates new men and women. To the very ones who doubted that Jesus could be other than the son of neighbors they knew, He claimed, "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: yea, and the bread which I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world" (John 6. 51).

In another, the final book, of the New Testament, we meet the remarkable imagery of the eating of a book, which the apocalyptic angel proffered to the seer (Rev. 10. 8–10). But no less remarkable is the testimony of the church that in the sacrament of the altar the believer receives the body and the blood of the Christ who became incarnate for the redemption of the world. The critics of Jesus were offended by His reference to Himself as a heavenly bread and meat, whose eating was eternal life. The critics of the Bible have scoffed similarly against the notion that "devouring" the Scriptures could

give the power of a new life. But all the facts of Christian experience are against them. It is literally true that as men have feasted on this Word, or even, in faith, caught at its crumbs, they have felt a new, strange energy within them. As they have broken this bread they have recognized the voice of a Friend beside them, in whose hands they have seen the marks of martyrdom for their sake. At the touch of some redemptive power of this Word they have leaped to their feet and entered upon a new walk of life. All the arguments either for or against the Bible as the Word of God pale into insignificance beside the simple fact that here men have drunk and been healed, here they have eaten and been filled. That the Bible is the Word of God is the confession of Christians who have learned therein to know a God who has a word for mankind. To men who deny the existence of God or believe only in dumb gods who can not speak to man there is little that can be said, except this word of the ancient prophet, "Ye shall find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29. 13). Ultimately it is the heart

of man that makes him deaf and blind to the revelation of God.

With keen spiritual vision Luther saw that the key of Scripture was Christ, and the purpose of the writing and assembling and teaching of the books of the Bible was to present Christ. Of course, there is poetry and drama, history and archeology, moral teaching and prophetic power in these pages. But the thread that binds them together is the continuous power of God in making His love known to men. The words of promise unmarred by all the sins of Israel still held together the words of psalmist, priest, and prophet. The glad announcement of the coming of the Redeemer and the forming of His fellowship in the church gave unity to the various Gospels and Epistles. And as the purpose of Scripture unfolded, the interpretation was clarified. The reason for the Bible is the revelation of a knowledge of God, a knowledge summarized and realized in Jesus Christ. They who hear in His words the accents of the voice of God, and read in His life and death and resurrection the will of God for man, they can

declare the Bible as His Word and invite others to discover the same secret. Never yet have they succeeded in explaining *how* the Word revealed the Spirit, or *how* the Spirit revealed the Word. They have been content to say that the two are one, and their faith in Christ is inseparable from the source where it was born. Scripture without Christ, they would say, is like a book whose pages have fallen apart and all the meaning become distorted. And Christ without Scripture, they would hold to be a name without reality, for they have never found Him outside of Scripture, and all His meaning to them is as closely bound to the Bible as soul is one with body. Without the body which is the word and sacrament they have not known the Spirit, and the Spirit has given meaning and life to word and sacrament.

Is the Bible the Word of God for our life today? If the question implies that for every human situation there is in the pages of Scripture a sort of prepared prescription, so that all one needs is to find the page and verse and apply it as a law of conduct, then the question is wrongly

stated. Just such mechanistic and legalistic use of the Bible has discredited it as a guide or rule of life. For human interests and human institutions have been tempted to make the Book an instrument of human gain, and Scripture has been quoted for any purpose serving those who would exercise authority over fellow men. The living quality of the Word has been frozen and crystallized into forms susceptible of manipulation both by well-meaning and insincere leaders of humanity. Lacking the vitalizing Spirit which gave the Word form, the objective facts and statements of Scripture are but as archeological ruins testifying to a life which used to inhabit these regions. Codes and laws and customs may still be a deposit traceable in the lives of individuals and nations, but the Word of God can not be identified either with law or literature, psalm or proverb, history or prediction. Tagging certain books as "sacred" breathes no life into them. Even memorization of the contents of the Bible may mean no more than storing the mind with words. Monuments there are in the books of the Bible, but they can be beau-

tifully-wrought grave stones unless there blows through them a breath which again, as often it has done before, creates life where there was none and reveals a power no humanly-printed page can contain.

But that God still speaks through the means of this Word is the confession of every believing Christian. It has pleased Him to come into human life through a people of unique experiences, and the records of that people in Old and New Testament throws light upon the highway of His coming. No man ever so spoke as did He whose every accent and echo His followers have cherished as they have sought to hear more certainly what His message was. In a manner none has ever yet been able to fathom, the Spirit of God makes use of this collection of records and writings in order to make Himself known to each succeeding generation. They who heard the Master speak were convinced that it was the word of Him who sent this messenger, and in every age as men read these pages they experience a Presence speaking to their inner conscience and deepest feelings. Some have asked,

"Shall we wait for another?" and have demurred at this sort of message, but the combined experience of the generations has produced none other whose word has so penetrated into the secret recesses of the heart. The reading alone of chapters and books has not produced this effect, but "in, with, and under" the sensory perception of what is read has come a Person whose voice "the sheep know" as their Lord's voice. The deeper their communion with Him in these pages the clearer His way has appeared in all their tangled problems. Here is guidance that may be only dim, but He is there, and they who have found Him read anew the Scriptures for confirmation of their faith that He is the Lord of Life, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, the Light in death, and the King of an eternal realm more real than all the kingdoms of the earth.

In the history of the church few have appealed, as Luther, to Scripture. Yet he warned against tendencies which both before and after his time have put the Bible in a false light. "See to it," Luther urged, "that you do not make

of Christ a second Moses, or of the Gospel a book of laws and doctrines, as has been done heretofore."[2] He described the Scriptures as a "manger in which Christ lies,"[3] the most priceless of treasures. Unless one finds Christ, the Bible for all its value remains a law, and the distinction between law and gospel he has tersely defined as follows: "The law is the word of Moses to us, but the gospel is the word of God in us."[4] Only in the inner experience of faith can one truly say the Bible is the Word of God. "It is not enough to say, this Peter or Paul has said, but you must yourself, in your conscience *feel Christ Himself* [italics mine] and unwaveringly experience that it is the Word of God, even if all the world oppose you."[5] And how quietly though penetratingly this voice may come in human experience, Luther beautifully described in a striking image in one of his sermons. "When Christ comes into the heart through the Word, without disturbance and destruction, that is to go through closed doors. For when the Word of God comes, it does not divide the conscience nor stultify the understanding of the heart or out-

ward senses, as do the false teachers, who break all doors and windows, leap in as a thief, leave nothing whole and undisturbed behind, and cause all life, conscience, understanding and perception to become distorted, false and sundered. He comes through closed doors and has passed through wood and stone, in the preaching of the Word."[6]

Luther's distinction between the Word to us and the Word in us, law and gospel, is probably the best statement of the meaning of the Bible to those who do not find Christ in this book. One can not argue from the above that for such the Bible has no meaning. Far from it, the unbelief of some does not make the Word of none effect. It still remains a message of God to man. But its character is that of law, a law by which all human action shall eventually be judged. They who do not receive the Word in faith still are subject to its authority though it be to their condemnation.

The appeal to Scripture is the appeal of Scripture itself. Most of the human proofs which are supposed to buttress belief in the Bible, if

they have any worth at all, are themselves supported by Scripture. Scripture needs no other proof than it itself produces. If the reading and preaching of the Bible will not awaken faith, no apologetics will do so. Faith in the Word is indistinguishable from faith in Him who speaks through the Word. Our faith in God does not rest on our belief in the Bible, as if belief in a book were more fundamental than faith in the author of the book. Faith, whether it be in the word that is read or heard, or in the voice that speaks therein, is equally a gift of God and a creation of His Spirit. The place where we found Him is forever a sacred place, the book a Holy Writ, but until we found Him there it was only a common place and a book we could not understand. Not that different senses or a certain kind of intellect were requisite, but our vision and our hearing were opened. What before was mystery or parable; history or prophecy, now became the Word with which no human teacher's words could compare. Always the appeal to Scripture must be a confession of faith.

Chapter III

The Christian and the World

The teaching of the church has been inclined to treat of man's relationship to the world in terms of the past. And, one is tempted to add, to treat of God's relationship to creation in the same tense. For the emphasis is almost always on the origins, unless perchance the tense be future. Between the two, the present has suffered.

In the treatment accorded the physical world by the dogmatician, the work of God is seen in the days of creation. Each of those days is given a stamp of finality which reaches its climax in the seventh day when God "rested." It is not saying too much to claim that the result has been an impression in the layman's mind that God's attitude toward the world ever since has been a rather passive one. The image most aptly de-

scribing His relationship is probably that of the clockmaker who has wound up his mechanism and now watches it run by the inherent power he imparted to it. Current discussions about natural law corroborate this view. The universe runs according to laws which are objectivized to such an extent that some minds believe in the laws without believing in the God whose laws they are supposed to be. This divorce in thought between the Creator and creation has facilitated the development of a thoroughly secular view of the universe. The history of thought gives evidence that rationalistic dogmatics preceded rationalism, and in the fullness of time rationalism produced an explanation of the physical world which leaves God out altogether.

The teaching of Jesus should have put the church on its guard against a philosophy which gradually ejected the Lord of creation from His domain by giving God a sabbatical leave. We may recall that Jesus expressly said, "My Father worketh even until now, and I work" (John 5. 17). The circumstances of that assertion make it doubly significant. Jesus had cured a man who

for thirty-eight years had been crippled. "Now it was the sabbath, on that day. So the Jews said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath, and it is not lawful for thee to take up thy bed" (5. 9–10). To those critics it was that Jesus proclaimed that the Father worked on the Sabbath.

Remember, too, how Jesus described events for which we long ago relieved the Creator of direct responsibility, and which we turned over to the realm of "nature." "Behold the birds of the heaven, . . . your heavenly Father feedeth them" (Matt. 6. 26). "Consider the lilies of the field, . . . God doth so clothe the grass of the field" (Matt. 6. 28–30). "Your Father who is in heaven . . . maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5. 45). "And . . . he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered, Neither . . . but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9. 1–3).

Every page of the Gospels is vibrant with the energy of God, not a God slumbering in the dim

recesses of a hoary past, but a God now at work. Have we forgotten that the revelation to Moses was of the power who alone could say, "I am" (Ex. 3. 14)? The words and works of Jesus manifest that the Father is working in and through Him. "Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, . . . Jesus saith unto him, . . . he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; . . . the Father abiding in me doeth His works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake" (John 14. 8–14).

Modern generations have found it difficult to believe in the miracles. Certainly one contributing factor is our separation of God and His creation. We have made the universe a closed system of laws which God Himself can not break, and we find ourselves more disposed to trust the laws than the Creator. The miracles seem to be violations which we can not understand nor sanction. That they serve a higher purpose we can not admit, for we have enthroned our understanding of the laws of nature above our faith in the power of His grace.

Today the students of the natural sciences are less certain of the traditional explanation of the physical universe. The rigor of "law" has been tempered to mean hardly more than a statistical average.[1] Indeed the newer physics will not even use the older vocabulary but is creating a new system of symbols and formulae. For two centuries Christian doctrines have been molded by the influence of ways of natural thought which today are being discarded. The prison house in which some have wanted to confine Christian faith so that it would conform to established modes of thought now has no longer keys or locks. Christians are permitted to proclaim a faith which defies natural laws no longer considered natural, and to sing their songs of praise to a Lord who long ago burst traditional views of matter and customs which would prohibit His activity.

Of course, I do not hereby assert that there is no connection between the work of Christ and the constitution of the universe. What I am contending for is a presentation of the work of Christ as Scripture has presented it, unhindered

by preconceptions from other realms of knowledge which are constantly changing as men's ideas of the world change. Instead of fitting Christianity onto a scientific procrustean bed, the Christian will hold to his faith while he keeps in suspense the answers to questions which deal with the nature of matter and the age or destiny of the planets. The truth of the Christian faith is not determined by other knowledge derived from history, comparative religion, natural science, or philosophy. Its truth lies within itself, even as its authority must be experienced by each individual within himself. Religion does not live by crumbs falling from the tables of more independent lords of wisdom. Christian faith has a table of the Lord which gives sustenance to a life unique and autonomous. The Christian view of the world is the view of the man whose life is nourished from this hidden source of communion with a present Lord. His interpretation of mankind and life in the world is determined by his meeting with Christ in a revelation which is as continuous as life itself. In fact life to him is synonymous with the

revelation of God. The Father's working "even until now" implies that we live in a world where the Creator is still at the task of making new forms of being which may be quite unlike what has existed. But whatever the changing patterns of man's perception of the universe we can be sure that the God revealed in Jesus Christ is involved in its career and destiny. Only the Christian can believe such words of Christ as this one, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10. 29–30).

It is to the philosophers that the dogmaticians have gone for their mechanical explanations of a Prime Mover and all the subsequent mediate causes by which they have constructed their world picture. The Creator of the Scripture is a Being whose power defies the ability of prophets and psalmist to confine Him in neat categories. "Then Jehovah answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, . . . Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38. 1–4. A similar question meets us in Isaiah

40. 12, "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" One might imagine that such words would humble those who assayed to explain the work of God by their calendars and timetables. But no, some there are who obscure the *tremendum mysterium* with their chatter when the more proper response is one of unutterable awe in the presence of this might. We are not competent to speak, but we can sense the infinite extent of His work. And surely the present is the tense we must use. When we confess, simply, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth," we are not reciting a fact of history but confessing a contemporary process.

Here the Christian is aided by the modern view of a world in process of becoming. We waste our time in arguing about unknowable and unrevealed conditions at the dawn of creation, and are unaware of the continuing miracle of the dawn of each new day, the sinking sun, the

starlight, the passage of the seasons, the growth of the child, and the faith of the saint! I sometimes find more of actual wonderment in the pages of contemporary scientists than I do in the pages of the dogmatician. Mind, I say the dogmatician. The Biblical writer is different. But in the church we have fallen into the temptation to explain overly much, as if any human explanation does not belittle what can not be put into logic or measured sentence. We have confined creation to our measurements of time and thus deceived ourselves into believing that we understand. The revelation of Scripture presents us with a living, working God who even now is moving on the face of nothingness and bringing forth innumerable forms of life. "In Him we live and move and have our being," not as on the momentum of a remote creative act but in the energy of a Maker whose thought is more rapid than the speed of light. While physicists speak of the creation of immense springs of energy in the interstellar oceans, Christians go around thinking and acting as if the strength of God has well nigh ebbed out after a few thou-

sand years of human history. They forget the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews 13. 8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever," and the same writer's quotations from earlier sources,

> "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth,
> And the heavens are the works of thy hands:
> They shall perish; but thou continuest:
> And they shall wax old as doth a garment;
> And as a mantle shalt thou roll them up,
> As a garment, and they shall be changed:
> But thou art the same,
> And thy years shall not fail." (Hebrews 1. 10–12.)

Vast as is the panorama of the universe, and beyond our feeble understanding, we can recognize with gratitude each expansion of human observation of its greatness and profundity. The Christian not only has no quarrel with the student of the natural sciences who improves man's capacity to see the wonders of creation, but ought himself to be among the most eager and diligent of the discoverers of the unknown. In the long run even the superseded theories of how these things came to be may increase our capacity for

wonder, and our humility before the Creator. A recent Gifford lecturer[2] asserts that man's notion of the world as a machine is "the most pitiful and beggarly of the concepts with which mankind has approached the interpretation of the great mystery. That men should have supposed a concept derived from their own petty contrivances applicable to the mighty sum of things, to the Cosmos itself, undermines faith in human reason beyond all the arguments adduced to demonstrate its utter pauperdom." If a contemporary thinker can speak thus of the failure of reason to produce an adequate picture of the universe, what can be said of those who would reduce the Biblical dynamism to their own static comprehension, and hold to a machine view of creation, long ago finished by a Maker not now active or in evidence?

Belief in a contemporary creator whose handiwork is reflected in every mountain flower and the shifting paths of moonlight on the ocean wave need not at all be a pantheistic faith or a religion of immanence from which a Karl Barth is required to recall us to a vision of a tran-

scendent God. The world can still be God's without His identity being submerged in His work. All the insistence of Barth on the "Wholly Other" can be granted without sabotage of the ancient belief in the goodness of His creation. Is it probably the Christian's fault that the world has been forfeited to the non-Christian scientist for investigation and possession? The Christian has harbored the suspicion that the world is inherently evil. The old Gnostic heresy of the evil of matter has really never died out. But what becomes of it today when new views of matter make it seem but another form of energy? It appears that the only logical course for that heresy is to go the full way to Buddhistic nihilism. If matter be a form of life then not matter but life itself must be denied. From that conclusion Christianity recoils. It is a faith in life, in the Maker of life, in the living of life, in the eternity of life. It is a life wherein will is supreme, and a life in a world where the Father's will permits the existence of other wills. From the interrelationships of those wills flow

all the varied, fateful events of life in the universe.

I believe we shall come to a new understanding of the nature of man as we gain deeper insight into the connection of body and spirit. Altogether too easily, and without sanction in Scripture, we have located evil in the body and made mind or spirit a more ethereal thing which has within it the potentiality of eternal existence. We have misapplied a word of Christ in Gethsemane to everyday experience which hardly bears our interpretation. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14. 38) is not a description of human behavior. For in general the flesh is willing to do the bidding of the spirit. It is our spirits that are weak. The hand or foot that sins is a member of a body moved by a mind. We make our bodies scapegoats for our failings. In truth the source of sin is in the heart of man, which again is no anatomical structure but an expression of the whole man, that which binds him together into a unity. In humanity at least there is no salvation of the soul apart from a salvation of the body. Man,

the object of redemption, is created body and soul; Christ, the Redeemer, must needs become Incarnate, taking on Himself the bodily nature of man; the end of redemption is associated with the resurrection of the body. We can neither think in disembodied terms nor can the work of God concern us apart from the bodies in which we find ourselves. Paul seems to be thinking of the opening scene of the drama of life as he describes the closing act (1 Corinthians 15. 38–40), "God giveth . . . to each seed a body of its own. . . . There are also celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial." But there is a body, both in creation and at the resurrection. The body is no less a gift of God than what we call spirit. In the final analysis spiritual qualities must be capable of corporeal expression. Man must be saved in his whole being. The world is neither a creation of substance or matter on which impersonal forces play, nor a company of ghostly spirits who dwell in a highly abstract atmosphere. For better or worse it is a creation of bodies and spirits knit together in indissoluble unity, and engaged in a terribly serious business of relation-

ships between each other and their Maker. A Swedish theologian, Aulén, has reintroduced into modern vocabulary the old language of a drama, seeking to picture even the Atonement in dramatic terms. I believe we would do better to lay aside much of the old substance vocabulary inherited from Aquinas and Aristotle and go back with Aulén to Irenaeus and other fathers who interpreted the faith less in terms of philosophy and more in the word imagery of the playwright dealing with human actions and interactions. God's method of revelation was not a doctrine, but a life, the life of Moses, an Elijah, a John the Baptist, a Paul, and supremely the life of His own Son. The pages of dogmatics are pale beside the full-bodied careers of the prophets, the apostles, missionaries, and saints of all the ages. Even the great teachers, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, are understood only with reference to their lives in the world of their days.

A colleague of Aulén, Anders Nygren, has carried out the theme of conflict and seen the history of Christian thought itself as a contending

between rival conceptions of God. Aulén has said of his contemporary, "The most deeply burrowing, the most widely viewing and sharply penetrating of the theological writings produced in Lund during the latest decades is Anders Nygren's book, *Eros and Agape*. He has sought to let this Christian idea of love, agape, stand out in its purity and its depth, without debilitating interpretations, stand out as the divine love which struggles with and saves from evil. He has sought consistently to see Christ and His work in this context and from this point of view."[3]

With less attention to metaphysical subtleties and more stress on what Christ's actions and words mean to men and women in His day we may discover their vitality and relevance for our own day, when certainly a mighty conflict is abroad. Probably as science finds its own explanations more like pictures or patterns by which the facts of observation are brought together into coherence and significance, theology may be willing to admit that its explanations are not proofs but presentations of profoundly real

forces acting on the hearts, the bodies and souls of men and women today. Kierkegaard, who pointedly remarked that Christ "did not teach that man might be redeemed, but He redeemed man,"[4] found the significance of Christ in His person and His deed. His opposition to the speculative philosophy of Schelling and Hegel was directed to their abstraction of a system from the historical context. Aulén[5] and Nygren, who are not uninfluenced by the Danish thinker, hold that it is not the function of dogmatics to prove, but to present the view of faith. What the Christian faith beholds is its own authentication, not least because it presents the contemporary Christ who today as always suffers, dies, rises again in the hearts of men and women who have found Him their Redeemer in life's awful battle. Our hymns are sometimes our best dogmatics.

"Lord, in Thee I place my trust,
Thou art my Defence and Tower;
Death Thou treadest in the dust,
O'er my soul he hath no power.
That I may have part in Thee,
Help and save and comfort me;

Give me, of Thy grace and might,
Resurrection, life, and light."

JOHANN HEERMANN, 1644.
Translated by CATHERINE WINKWORTH, 1855.

For Christian education the foregoing has some clear implications. The world as God's creation is of interest to every Christian. Every region of human knowledge is open to him, and the truth he discovers through his senses is a revelation of the Father's power and wisdom. There is nothing the modern biologist can know which the Christian may not learn, even if he rejects completely such an interpretation as Julian Huxley puts upon the facts observed. "The history of life, it is asserted, manifests guidance on the part of some external power; and the usual deduction is that we can safely trust that same power for guidance in the future. I believe this reasoning to be wholly false. The purpose manifested in evolution, whether in adaptation, specialization, or biological progress, is only an apparent purpose. It is just as much a product of blind forces as is the falling of the stone to earth[6] or the ebb and flow of the

tides. It is we who have read purpose into evolution, as earlier men projected will and emotion into inorganic phenomena like storm or earthquake. If we wish to work toward a purpose for the future of man, we must formulate that purpose ourselves. Purposes in life are made, not found."[7] This is Huxley's, "I believe." The Christian student who has found Christ in his experience would reply, "I believe this reasoning to be wholly false." But though the creeds differ, the one may as patiently and honestly as the other study the materials of the sciences. The Christian may admit his vision to be dim, but he thinks that the "blind forces, in the falling of the stone," may be seen by a Creator whose vision is better than ours. He may not be able to fathom storm or earthquake, but yet hear a still small voice which gives courage and peace in time of stress. Because he believes this world is the work of an intelligent being he is convinced that there may be meaning in his applying his intelligence to studying it.

In the field of human action and history the Christian will seek to trace the divine will in

its conflict with opposing wills. To him history will have meaning because God is in it. The rise and fall of empires will be not merely the Spenglerian chart of growth and death of cultures, but somehow the deeds of men and nations serve the purpose of God. The forms and achievements of art and music will interest him, because they reflect creative talents possible only if endowed by a Creator, Himself an artist. The literature and drama of the race will reveal something of the variety and richness of His powers who not only formed the players but is present in their scenes and plots, their comedies and tragedies. The Christian has too often reduced the world to dimensions more akin to his abilities and experiences. In so doing he has reduced the Cross to something less than the world-redeeming symbol it is in His experience. We simply can not comprehend such words as, "Taketh away the sins of the world," or, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now," or, "It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of

Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49. 6). But our want of faith can not make of none effect the faithfulness of a God who is the God of all creation, all the living, all the generations from eternity to eternity. His is the world and the fullness thereof, and all things are ours in Christ.

Chapter IV

Forgiveness as a Social Force

Einar Billing, a Swedish theologian of a generation ago, has written a little book on the Christian idea of vocation. In it he has a thought-provoking passage on the theology of Luther. "Whoever knows Luther, even but partially," he said, "knows that his various thoughts do not lie alongside each other, like pearls on a string, held together only by common authority or perchance by a line of logical argument, but that they all, as tightly as the petals of a rosebud, adhere to a common center, and radiate out like the rays of the sun from *one* glowing core, namely, the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. There would be, indeed, no peril of leading astray were we to establish this as the norm for anyone wishing to study Luther: never believe that you

have a correct understanding of a thought of Luther before you have succeeded in reducing it to a simple corollary of the thought of the forgiveness of sins. Thus, to take from the whole but an example or two from various viewpoints, his theory of the sacraments, his idea of the church, his doctrine of Christian liberty, his teaching about the call. We could take all of them in order and say about like this: the church is the forgiveness of sins, the sacraments are the forgiveness of sins, liberty is the forgiveness of sins, the call is the forgiveness of sins."[1]

It would not be difficult to relate this striking analysis of Luther's thinking to the heart of the New Testament gospel. There, too, we are confronted with a message of forgiveness. Neither the contemporaries of Jesus nor those of Paul could understand that this could be the essence of God's revelation to men. In our own day, Nygren has emphasized anew the *agape,* with its implication that the love of God is entirely unmerited by man, so that there is no human reason why God should love him. Yet God forgives because He is God.

But the history of human thought has been a tide flowing in another direction. Man's desperate cry to God for salvation is often but a reflection of his conviction that he ought not to have been forsaken. Something there is in him which deserves better treatment. Is there not in him an image of God, preserved through all the vicissitudes of his fate, which should evoke the sympathy of the Creator? Or, where the doctrine of the image has been discarded, is not man in himself a worthy enough object of solicitude? The natural dignity of man is believed in long after faith in a personal God has disappeared. Dignity means worth, and worth involves estimation. If there be not a God who puts a high price on man, his value must be of his own declaring. Logically there is as little reason for believing in man's high estate as for believing in a God who considers man worthy. But rationalism is loath to give up faith in man, for what is then left? So the dignity of man is affirmed, and its basis is itself a materialistic faith. In the words of Mercier,[2] "the philosophy both of the idealistic and the materialistic naturalism"

makes "the individual naturally good because he is part of nature; and nature is necessarily good, because it is all the good there is, all the God there is." But where man's worth rests on his own estimation of himself, then no place remains for the forgiveness of sins.

Within Christian thought the tendency has been to codify and institutionalize, so that the power of the gospel has been turned from the personal relationship of forgiveness into schemes of ethics or laws of communities. We might term it a process of objectivization. The antagonist of *agape,* in the New Testament and ever, is *nomos.* Fundamental in all religious thinking is the antipathy between law and gospel. Christ had to defend Himself against the teachers of the law. Paul opposed the promise to the law. Luther held that the truth of Christianity was expressed in terms of gospel versus law. What is the explanation of such a controversy when both law and gospel are admittedly elements in the structure of Christian truth?

The problem has relevance to contemporary affairs, for it touches on the distinction between

church and state, on the meaning and place of natural law, on the question of citizenship and the relation of the Christian to the non-Christian community. What is the field of the mercy of God and what the significance of the forgiveness of sins in the everyday life of every man? If the center of Christianity is the *agape* of God expressing itself in forgiveness of sins, and if it is asserted that these are impracticable or meaningless forces in human life as it is, then Christianity is but a beautiful fancy, impotent in the arena of human existence.

The point at which we might attempt to untangle this series of knotty problems is the nature of sins for which forgiveness may be sought. The old definition of sin as everything contrary to the will of God is a good deal wider than its application by the majority of Christians. Throughout the centuries they have been tempted to limit the scope of sin to a few rather concrete types of conduct. We recall how scribes and Pharisees concentrated their teachings about sin on certain ceremonial transgressions. In the course of missionary history, as heathen

peoples came over into the church, the sins for which the clergy prescribed penance were acts within a readily defined area of personal relationships. Tertullian[3] set the fashion of listing the deadly sins as seven. It is instructive to notice what he considered mortal sins: "Idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, fornication, false witness, and fraud." Augustine made love of self the ground of sin, and thereby shifted the emphasis from specific sinful acts to a sinful disposition out of which the evil deeds grew. Monasticism had its deadly sins, eight in number: Gluttony, unchastity, avarice, dejection *(tristitia),* anger, sloth *(acedia),* vainglory, and pride. Luther considered doubt as the greatest of all sins, just as its opposite, faith, was the mother of virtues. We know how readily Pietism and Puritanism cataloged the vices and made them synonymous with sin. In general it has been true that even though the great reformers, such as Augustine and Luther, have turned the attention of Christians inward to the sources of sin, the teachers of the church and the lay mind have agreed on certain acts of sin. Murder,

adultery, theft have usually held their place in any scheme of vices, along with idolatry, greed, anger, and pride. On the one hand sins are thought of as wrong relationships with fellow men, on the other, with God.

The significance of the analysis of what constitutes sin is evident when we ask, what sins does God forgive? If sin be that which is contrary to the will of God, then in determining what sin is we establish what is the will of God. And if history gives evidence that sin has been interpreted differently in succeeding generations, it follows that the will of God has been variously understood. We need not therefore jump to the conclusion of relativity, and say that any generation's interpretation of God's will is only a reflection of that period's experience of what is morally acceptable. No individual, and no single generation, can exhaust the meaning of God's will for mankind. At best, we see only in part. The important fact is that we acknowledge the partiality of our experience, and refrain from making the partial the whole.

For each new generation has novel temptations, and must see in its contemporary situation what is in accordance with the will of God and what is opposed. No inherited code from the past is sufficient to meet the demands of a new day. Nothing less is adequate than a continuing revelation of a God who makes known His will today as He did in earlier times. Forgiveness of sins must be a forgiveness of present-day sins. Only a present God, present in the resurrection power of Christ, can forgive such sins.

From this standpoint we behold the shortcoming of the law. Long ago Paul declared, "If there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law" (Gal. 3. 21). The inclination of Christians has always been to schematize the will of God into the form of laws whose observance would guarantee a Christian order of life. But these laws invariably reflect the character of their makers. To pass them on as the forms in which Christian life is to be lived is gradually to constrict the area in which the grace of God is operative. The letter of the law killeth slowly

and imperceptibly, but none the less surely. Not only can no law make alive, but no law can perfectly express life. There must be room for growth or freedom of movement, else the laws of the Christian life as formulated by one generation stifle the growth of another. And of course, no obedience to any law begets life.

Is this to say that what is adultery in one century may not be adultery in another, or murder, or idolatry? How inevitably the ancient objection arises. Is not the law good? Or how subtle the temptation, let us then discard the law! God forbid. The law is good, but it is insufficient, whether we be in the twentieth century, or in the first. No law can be written which will comprehend all of God's will, even apart from man's inability to fulfill all that is written. The truth is that *the secret of life is not essentially a relationship to law.* The secret of the Christian life is a personal relationship to a Divine Person. The imagery of the gospel is the picture of the family, the home, the father, the children, and not the paraphernalia of the courtroom. Every fresh outburst of life in Christian history has

entailed a breaking of bonds of legalism which have fastened themselves on a church when the spontaneous activity of one generation has ebbed in a succeeding one. It is not that the laws were bad, but they were the expression of life in one era, or country, or culture, and they were impotent to call forth new life with which to fill the old forms. Quite likely the new life would create similar forms, as new trees grow into familiar shapes, but those forms must themselves develop from an inner source within themselves. If we believe that the law represents a true result of the life which gave it form, then we must believe that if the life is present it will manifest itself in a form consonant with the law we cherish. Our primary concern must be with the fountainhead of life.

It is a well-known fact that the liturgical dress of the clergy in the older churches is but a standardization of garb which originally belonged to an earlier period. Civilian dress changed, the church perpetuated the older style. The great monuments of church architecture of the Middle Ages have become the prototypes of ecclesi-

astical structures in the twentieth century. Such crystallization of forms may be praiseworthy in vestments, in art, in architecture. We need to guard against the tendency to freeze the thought forms and the moral patterns of bygone eras and call only these Christian, making it necessary for a new generation to become antiquarians in order to understand the vital force which created those molds. Forgiveness of sins then comes to mean the forgiveness of other kinds of sins than we are acquainted with in the present world. To the sins of our own generation we plead "not guilty," claiming that no one can prove that we are individually responsible. We are puzzled about contemporary sins but not repentant about them.

Indeed, this is the very heart of our problem. In the swift changes which have produced our modern world, both good and bad, the church has not been able to keep up with the hurried tempo. Thinkers have not reinterpreted the gospel into the vocabulary of our day. Artists have failed to create the symbols which the imagination of the people could grasp. The proclama-

tion of the forgiveness of sins fails to touch hearts and minds which do not know the meaning of sin, because they have no conception of the will of God against which they commit sin.

Consider the consequences. Failing to sense the relationship of God to the physical universe, we construct a science which leaves God out. Unable to understand what His will might be in politics and economics, we construct a state which is supposed to have nothing to do with the church. Accepting the dilemma, the church constructs a system of ethics based on a theory that an individual has no responsibility for the community in which he lives. His sins are against God alone, and his salvation has little consequence outside of himself. Since the sixteenth century, social life has become more and more collectivized. The individual's place in communal life has been completely revolutionized. He has a place in government, in education, in trade unions, in stock companies, undreamed of in the century of Luther or Calvin, or Spener or Wesley. There are a thousand ways of stealing which they never knew. And the rev-

olution in warfare is as great as any other, so that the Commandment not to kill means something quite different than it did in the days of mercenaries and localized wars.

Our peril today is that we can understand the guilt of our great-grandfathers better than we can understand the nearer sins for which we must have forgiveness. We have restricted the will of God to a few areas of life, and not always the more important ones. Knowledge of sin, the older dogmaticians used to teach, must precede penitence. But we exclude the possibility of penitence by saying God's will does not extend to politics, international relationships, monopolies, corporations, cartels, divorce laws, or labor unions. We have made sins private affairs between God and man, and put on them a value lower than Tetzel with his indulgences. In many circles forgiveness of sins is a meaningless term, for there are neither sins to be forgiven nor a God to forgive them.

We need, first of all, the restoration of the conviction that God's will is commensurate with all of man's life, and of all men's lives. He may

have to achieve His purposes through a remnant, but He is more than a God of a remnant. He is the God of the whole. We may not understand the whole, but we can still believe and act in the belief that His will embraces and His truth "lighteth every man coming into the world" (John 1. 4). There are no autonomous provinces in human experience except as they have rebelled against His rule. All history, not only Biblical history, is the object of His government. The Church is not some self-appointed executor of His kingdom on earth but the body of Christ including all His redeemed of every age and nation. His true followers are the light of the earth, a lighthouse sending forth beams of truth in the darkness and storms, not merely a feeble flame nourished by terrified disciples huddling in some obscure place awaiting His return.

The argument that society is too complex today to respond to the Christian message, or that the individual is so hopelessly entangled in industrial and political machinery that he can not be responsible, is but a modern form of doubt. What man has made he can remake. The mech-

anism of society is not so obdurate but it will feel the impulses of the individual. Indeed in the system his actions have repercussions not possible in conditions of greater isolation. God is able to work even in a machine age with mechanized individuals. Our fear of the solidarity of modern existence is a fear that it is beyond salvation. Such is not the Christian faith. The unbelief of man does not make the promise of God of none effect. Impressive as the monuments of modern civilization are, they are yet anchored in the hearts and minds of men and women. If these can be reached by the gospel of forgiveness there is yet hope of a new social order, or at least of better men and women.

These men and women — laborers, farmers, capitalists, bankers, educators, office workers, scientists, the idle rich and the idle poor, the obscure citizens and the influential politicians— must be confronted with the proclamation that it is God's will that every individual be accounted as a child of His kingdom. Not only does He demand that love dictate our relations with wife or husband, but that we share in the

responsibility of our community for the development of a healthy sex relationship among all our youth. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" was first spoken to the *people* of Israel. Christians can not escape a share of guilt in the red-light districts of their city, even if they have moved their place of worship and their homes far away from that district.

Stealing and murder are crimes the modern man or woman can not escape. Not directly does he strike the fatal blow or do away with his neighbor's goods. But in an economy of money such as ours, it is the community as a whole which can plunder by a legislative act. Stocks and bonds were unknown in Scriptural times, but the greed which the prophets castigated still lives in these more refined times where legal instruments can rob the widow and deprive the fatherless. And in modern war no man's hands are clean. They are full of blood, every citizen's hands, for in wars today it is not a combat between soldiers but a long-range struggle between populations. Verily, indeed, if we truly under-

stand God's will for our day, who can stand guiltless?

Of these and a multitude of other sins we are guilty. It is not only that we have broken certain laws, but law itself has not kept up with the intricacies of industrial civilization. Many are the cases in which "there ought to be a law," but no law exists and man's cupidity has gone on unrestrained. Hence we are not even aware of the number of our transgressions. Even if the church had succeeded in matching each new form of temptation with a new legal prescription the increase of obedience would not thereby be assured. Multiplication of laws does not result in multiplication of righteousness.

Again we return to the conviction that our essential need is for the presence in our midst of the Risen Christ. The individual, every individual, must come face to face with His Person in order to learn the will of God in everyday affairs of today's world. For God's will extends into every element of the contemporary order and must be reckoned with in each action and condition of human existence. It will not do to

talk only of His Kingdom and His purpose. We must live in the light of His countenance upon us. Behold your God! is no salute to a coming event far in the unpredictable future, at the end of time. It is the prophetic insight of the actual presence of God in the problems we now are struggling with. The God revealed to us by Jesus "seeth in secret" (Matt. 6. 4), and is no farther away than "thine inner chamber." You need only to "shut the door" against the din and unbelief outside and "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46. 10). We go out again to bring our knowledge of His will into the world's din and unbelief. Or to use Paul's words in Romans 7. 4, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be joined to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit unto God." In our marriage to Christ, in the intimate fellowship with His spirit, we learn what to do and find power to do it in a way unknown to those who rely on laws to produce righteousness.

Much of our searching for principles and causes, and even for what we are pleased to call truth, is a search for some way of evading God in human affairs. We write endless volumes on the conditions of mankind, and call them scientific if we can leave out all mention of a divine power or will. We write countless other books to picture what human life might become, again, without taking into account any part God might have in the reconstruction. Because, so we say, men can not agree on the deepest problems of religion we will rule out references to religion and proceed as if no God exists. I can understand why differences in attitudes toward organized churches may justify omission of *ecclesiastical* claims in studies of social problems. But to leave out the problem of man's responsibility to God in the treatment of human affairs is to make any answer we arrive at less than the truth. Even to claim that we are seeking the truth when we have denied the Author of Truth is to be guilty of deceit and delusion. The fallacy of our so-called scientific generation is that men conceive that there is truth apart from God, and

then search for a truth which leaves Him out.

The crucial point at which both our tangled social order and our confused private lives can find solutions is in the individual's confrontation by the Risen Christ. There is no salvation of society as such, but there is a salvation of society by the redemption of the individuals who contribute to the making of society. And here we meet the old doctrine of the call, or vocation, again. Just as little as a man's sins can be separated from the society of which he is a part, just so little can a Christian fulfill his vocation apart from his place in society. The temptation even of Protestantism to interpret the Christian life as made up of virtues relevant to the monastery, has had the fatal result of depriving society of the contributions Christians might make to its welfare. Luther criticized bitterly the monks and nuns who escaped into seclusion in order not to have to serve their fellow men. If the sins we are guilty of are sins committed in our dealings with fellow men, true repentance will be directed toward a right relationship with them, and forgiveness will mean the birth of a power

to change those evil relationships into righteous ones. God's forgiveness of the kind of sins I commit in my vocation is the fulcrum God would use for lifting social life to His level in the area of my vocation. Here is the point at which the grace of God is transformed into hope and love, hope for the future, and love for the present.

The kingdom of God comes not by any law, natural or divine. It comes by the entering of God into the lives of men and women whose evil ways have been turned into His way. The kingdom does not come in any division of the private life into sacred and secular, or of the public domain into Church and State. When He comes, He claims man's life entirely. "With whom will ye compare me?" is still the challenge of His authority. The forgiveness of sins, the sins *we* commit, the sins we are aware of when we enter into communion not with His law, but with Himself, is the point at which He can break through our opposition and establish His supremacy in the citadels of contemporary life.

In the ethics of Luther, neither the kingdom of God nor the law of God is central, but our

neighbor.[4] Christian love expresses itself in our serving him in his need in the same spirit of free mercy as God has shown us. Our service can not be given as a means to any other end, for instance the building of the kingdom. It is not to be calculated for its worth as glorifying God. The kingdom will come and His name will be hallowed as we serve our neighbor in his need, but that service is for its own sake, unpremeditated, unrequited, even, maybe, unremembered. Only thus is the true nature of God's love mediated by the Christian to a world which can only thus be redeemed.

The ordinary citizen at his daily task, the legislator in the halls of Congress, the businessman in his office, the teacher in his classroom, the laborer at his routine job, the employer at his board meeting—go on, lengthen the roll of today's occupations, yet there is not one in which Christ, the Risen Christ, can not make His presence felt, if the door of forgiveness of sins is opened, and His voice be permitted to be heard, even if silently, in the individual conscience. We can keep Him out. We can keep the

doors locked and within them go on plotting our course and drawing our blueprints of a world underground. But there is a kingdom which He would give us—for the kingdom is a gift—if He could only forgive us our sins, if only He could break into our mean, miserly, miserable hearts and reveal to us His will for all of life. Not only can He show how all of us, high and low, share in the world's guilt, but He can show Himself as the bearer of the sins of the world, and in forgiving us reveal the power of forgiveness to create a new world. For if He has made us alive from our trespasses, we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2).

A distinction must be made between the kingdom of God as a goal and as a process. In this world the nature of the kingdom is the latter. And the instrumentality is precisely the forgiveness of sins. When men ask, can the kingdom be realized on earth? they think usually of a completed order of righteousness supplanting the present order of things. But a more relevant form of the question would be, Can God forgive

every kind of sin which man commits in the contemporary world? Does the gospel of forgiveness apply to men and women in every occupation and profession, on the lowest and highest levels? Our answer is, yes. And it should be added that the manifestation of the kingdom is primarily in Christ's forgiveness of today's sins in today's human life. He can forgive the businessman, the prostitute, the educator, the statesman, the farmer, the student, the artist, the journalist, if each of these confesses and is repentant over the sins he or she commits in his or her calling. This is the point at which the kingdom of God enters into human life of today, and the nature of the kingdom is expressed in forgiven hearts more perfectly than in the architecture and trappings of ecclesiastical organizations. Out of these forgiven hearts come new minds and bodies and spirits which build a society reflecting the will of Him who has become Lord in their lives. Forgiveness is the force that energizes the people of God and produces an order of things different from that where unforgiven sins prevail and thrive. The individual is called to

show forth the nature of a merciful and creative God in his life. Thereby he affects the life of his time and place, and witnesses to the present reality of the kingdom. Doubt despairs of the force of love, and men prefer to make love and force opposites or alternatives. But Christian faith is essentially a faith in the power of love, God's love, to save the world. To the question when will God's kingdom come in the fullness of its glory to Israel, the answer still stands, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority" (Acts 1.7). But where there is forgiveness of sins, there the kingdom is already present.

Chapter V

The Church as the Body of Christ

In Western Christendom two words came to signify the people who bore the name of Christian. The Romance languages adopted the Greek *ekklesia,* the Teutonic gave currency to a derivative of *kyriakos,* namely, our word "church." In the former case the concept was that of the assembly of Christians, the congregation and its ordering. The latter word referred to the building in which the Christian cult centered. For "church" was the place of worship, the house of the Lord *(kyrios).* The word seems to have been used by the Teutonic peoples even before their Christianization, and it has been suggested (cf., Oxford English Dictionary) that these northern heathen first came to know and use the word through their raids on the buildings of the

Christians in the days of the Roman Empire. When the missionaries converted them and built sanctuaries among them the whole concept of Christianity was comprehended in a word associated with the sacred building. The word absorbed the idea expressed in "ecclesia," so that gradually the Christian assembly, its rites and its hierarchy, also was indicated by the same word.

But our interest is not in philology. Rather the history of the word is here suggested to illustrate how easily the emphasis shifts from the New Testament idea of a people of God made one in Christ to secondary manifestations of the existence of such a people. For whether it be the assembly gathered together in worship, or the building in which the worshipers meet with the ministry who are entrusted with the holy things, we are dealing with the results rather than the cause, with secondary rather than with primary things. The Christian church can not be understood by considering either the congregation or what is done in a church building.

Of the two terms, "ecclesia" stands closer to the words used by Paul when he describes this new fact introduced by Christ. When he addressed the Christians at Corinth as "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1. 1) he used the Greek word *"ekklesia,"* and then went on to define it as composed of "them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints" *(kletois agiois)*. In the address to the Romans, the Philippians, the Ephesians, the Colossians, the word for church is not used, but the Christians are described in the same phrase, "called saints," the saints at Rome, Philippi, Ephesus, Colossae. Similarly, in concluding his epistles, Paul sometimes said, "The churches salute you," but also, "The saints salute you." His thought is fixed on the "brethren" who are "sanctified in Christ Jesus." It is a fellowship of people who stand in a peculiar relationship to Christ which makes the ecclesia, or church. The key to the meaning of the church thus is Christ Himself. Neither an edifice nor an assembly of people is Christian. The church of Christ has its meaning from Him who created it.

For in the New Testament the church is a new creation. So novel and unique is this creation that it can be described only with reference to that other great miracle of the New Testament, namely, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The saints who constitute the ecclesia are in a relationship to Christ which the author of the Epistle to the Ephesians does not hesitate to identify as a participation in His resurrection. "Dead in trespasses as we were, God was so rich in mercy that for his great love to us he made us live together with Christ — together with Christ he raised and seated us within the heavenly sphere in Christ Jesus" (Moffatt, Eph. 2. 4–6). Already this writer had declared that the power which works in the saints is the "strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Eph. 1. 20). And the same thought is expressed in the Epistle to the Romans, "Like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6. 4).

But along with the identification of the "saints" as those in whom the resurrection power

of God has manifested itself, the New Testament is quick to emphasize the idea of a body of believers. Lest the individual believe that he is raised to a life in which he has a sovereignty and freedom of his own, he is immediately confronted by the obligation he stands in both to Christ and to his fellows. The resurrection of the Christian from death is a resurrection from sin, a state in which self is the ruling principle. It is a resurrection to righteousness, a state in which Christ is all in all. Modern individualism has poisoned our minds in making us think that the Christian has a freedom which liberates him from obligations. Freedom in itself is a meaningless term. It is a freedom from, and a freedom to, something that makes it significant. The Christian is free from the sovereignty of sin, but only if his freedom exists as an obedience to another sovereignty, the rule of Christ. The New Testament knows nothing of the freedom of the individual in the sense of modern liberalism, a self autonomous and free and neutral with regard to powers above him, whom he may choose or not choose to serve. This notion of self is itself

a "yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5. 1). "For ye, brethren, were called for freedom; only use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another" (Gal. 5. 13). The Christian concept of freedom is inseparable from the idea of Christian love. The heresy of modern secularism is that it has divorced the two and kept only the one. It claims that love is impracticable. In truth, freedom apart from love is unreal, and modern freedom has become an "occasion to the flesh." Individualism has created a bondage hardly less tolerable than subservience to a false notion of law. The idea of law implies social responsibility, whereas the worst forms of individualism lead directly to anarchism. The alternative to righteousness by law is not a righteousness without law, but a righteousness of faith in a God whose rule creates fellowship by love instead of commandment. But the fellowship remains and is essential.

When, in the Epistle to the Romans, Paul emphasizes the release of the individual from the bondage of sin, he proceeds to relate the freedom of the Christian to the idea of the new

Israel. In this he is typical of the New Testament. Christ came not to liberate a host of individuals to spiritual autonomy, but to redeem a people. The aged Zacharias, standing on the threshold of the New but representing the Old, sang with clairvoyant vision,

> "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
> For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people, . . .
> To grant unto us that we being *delivered* out of the hand of our enemies
> Should *serve him* without fear,
> In *holiness* and *righteousness* before him all our days."
>
> Luke 1. 68, 74–75.

All the imagery of the New Testament is drawn from the Old Testament description of a *people,* a body of men, women and children living in the relationship of family and community, and in national experiences. Christian dogmatics has too easily abstracted individuals from their social milieu and described their redemption in terms of renunciation of all their former ties. One can not get out of the world in order to be saved from the world. "The Son of man is come

eating and drinking" (Luke 7. 34), and while some would say, "Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" it still seems a part of the plan of divine redemption that eating and drinking be included in the circumstances which reflect His presence. "The kingdom of God," indeed, "is not eating and drinking," (Romans 14. 17), but any "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" which disregards the conditions under which food is raised and consumed, is a kingdom more akin to Platonic shadows than to the kingdom of Him who taught his profoundest truth at a supper table. Greek speculative theology, based on an unreal distinction between body and spirit, has misled the church into an asceticism which is foreign to a faith which believes that the will of God is expressed in a corporeal mode of existence. "I know, and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean of itself" (Romans 14. 14).

The Biblical hope of redemption implies a right control and use of the created world rather than an escape from or annihilation of it. "Cre-

ation was subjected to vanity" (Romans 8. 20), but "in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption." Creation in itself is not evil, but it has come under the subjection of an evil power. From this it must be delivered, or as the New Testament often describes it, ransomed. Humanity is serving wrong masters. Men are "servants of sin," "presenting your members as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity" (Romans 6. 17, 19). Centering his life upon the wrong leaders, man throws all social life out of focus. A new creation means a new center in human life, a relating of all experiences and possessions to Jesus Christ. The resurrection and ascension of Christ brings into the midst of a people captive in sin a new fellowship, the ecclesia of those who follow a new Lord and another kingdom. The human relationships still remain, the same conditions of social and community life are there, but the turning of the mind and will toward the Risen Christ establishes new attitudes, new decisions, new reactions, and immediately the struggle is on beween the old and the new, the vanity-

orientated and the God-centered. The conflict is so fateful because nothing less is involved than the whole of life and all of creation.

But the strategy is not one of individuals against the foe. Even the foe is not one nor single. "For we have to struggle, not with blood and flesh but with the angelic rulers, the angelic authorities, the potentates of the dark present, the spirit-forces of evil in the heavenly sphere" (Moffatt, Ephesians 6. 12). Were we to meet up singly against this array of invisible and intangible, but terribly real powers, our cause were hopeless. Luther has pictured the situation in undying words:

"The old malignant foe
E'er means us deadly woe:
Deep guile and cruel might
Are his dread arms in fight,
On earth is not his equal.

With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One
Whom God Himself elected."

The Valiant One is the Christ risen and ascended, and whom the words in Ephesians tell us God "raised from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come: and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1. 20–23).

This remarkable passage expresses the Christian faith in the fundamental relationships of creation. Supreme is the "Father of glory" (Eph. 1. 17). At his right hand is Christ, and "upon his shoulders is the government" of mankind, above every other sovereignty. All things are "in subjection under his feet." He is the head. At his feet every foe is vanquished, even the final foe, death, "for he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15. 25). We recognize in the imagery references to human members of the body, head, feet, right

hand, but the meaning transcends human elements. A divine language were needed to express these sublime conceptions, but we have difficulty enough, as did Nicodemus, in understanding earthy conceptions. Amid it all stands the direct reference to the church as the body of Christ. Not only is Christ at the right hand of the Father, and supreme over all his enemies, but He is also the head of a body which is the church. This body is the risen Christ and the saints risen in Him to a newness of life, both being at the right hand of the Father, both triumphing over their enemies. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren," the Epistle to the Hebrews says of Christ and those He sanctifies (2. 11). Head and body are inseparable. The church as the body of Christ is the "congregation" (2. 12) in whose midst is the Christ. The redemption of the individual is his adoption into the family of God and into the life of Christ's household. Thereby he becomes involved in the Valiant One's struggle with and mastery over His foes.

The Old Testament Israel was a people distinctly recognized and marked as a people. By birth and circumcision the individual was a member of the body. The Israel of the New Testament required another kind of birth and a circumcision not made with hands. But the ecclesia is just as real as the twelve tribes. The twelve disciples were the bearers of the Word which was able to create new individuals, and in the fellowship of forgiven sins the Christians gathered around a common table where Christ, the present Christ, was Head. The New Testament knows nothing of the distinction between a visible and invisible church. The church is everywhere as invisible as Christ who is not seen by human eyes, but it is just as visible as the presence of Christ is known to the opened eyes of faith. As long as we persist in judging the congregation by the human beings who claim membership in an association of people, we are forced to make distinctions between good and bad, clean and unclean. But the church is not an association of people with higher or lower standards, more or less social or ethical. The

church is primarily the fellowship of Christ with a people called to be sanctified by His power. To the unbeliever there can be no church at all for he does not see the unifying Person who is in the center of His people. He might speak of an invisible church, but only in scorn, invisible because nonexistent. To the believer the church is real, as real as Christ, risen from the dead and ruling in the hearts of His people.

To introduce such terms as "mystical," "invisible," is to confuse and mislead. The presence of Christ in the church is a miracle, no less a miracle than the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Ascension. All the work of God is miraculous, because it is His work, not ours. But classifying the works of God in the Incarnation as one kind, and the work of Christ in the fellowship of believers as another kind of miracles leads nowhere. The church, because the presence of Christ is central, is an object of faith, but it is no less nor more visible or invisible, mystical or explicable, than Christ Himself. The body of Christ must be conceived in the same terms as the Head of the church. Only con-

fusion can result when we dissect the body from the head and think we can explain the body per se. For then the body is dead and yields no truth as to what was the source of its life.

The history of the ecclesia is not identical with the history of the church as commonly known. The latter is a history of human associations and their laws, development, practices, leaders, events. In themselves these associations are important. They have had a vast influence in the story of humanity. Church history is as significant as diplomatic history, economic, political, social, legal history. But it is not, without much qualification, the history of the ecclesia. Some or all of these associations have identified themselves with the body of Christ, and even given the body another head in this world. Such assumption, or presumptuousness, has no basis in the New Testament. No human organization can claim to be the body of Christ. All ecclesiastical associations may have some relationship to that body, but none, however old or young, large or small, can arrogate to itself the title of the church of Christ in the sense of those sanc-

tified by the living Saviour. No human vessel has yet been devised to contain Him whom heaven and earth can not contain, whose Spirit moveth upon the face of the waters and over the hearts of mankind.

"For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind." FABER.

Possibly the best that can be said for any association that bears the name of the Christian church is that it may serve as a mother to bring to birth believers who compose the Body of Christ. All human life is connected with some anterior body.[1] We are born into life from a mother's body. Luther uses this Ecclesia Mater idea in his *Large Catechism* (Art. III, Part II), in defining the church. The Holy Spirit, he says, "has a peculiar congregation in the world, which is the mother that bears every Christian through the Word of God." Insofar as any human organization so preaches the Word and administers the sacraments which present Christ to mankind that men come to believe Him and to enter

into His fellowship, in that measure they may claim the name of Christian church and be regarded as witnesses to the ecclesia. Saints may be found in every division of Christendom. They are sanctified not by their membership in one or other group, but by their incorporation into that fellowship which constitutes the Body of Christ. Their fellowship is with the saints of all places and ages because they are one with Him who is Head and whose is the whole body, filling all in. Our ecclesiastical organizations do not make the church. The Presence of Christ in His body gives to our churches whatever reality they possess.

Strange how little of the "riches of Christ" (Eph. 3. 8) His followers have apprehended in the centuries of the churches! They have appropriated to themselves the promises and the possessions of the Word, but hardly noticed the primary function of the church as Paul saw it. For both in the Epistle to the Romans and in the Epistle to the Ephesians the thought moves from the new creation of the individual by fellowship with the Risen Christ to the reconcilia-

tion of Jew and Gentile into one. In Ephesians we even find parallel language. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2. 10), and Christ "made both one,. . . that he might create in himself of the two one new man" (2. 14–15). The bringing together of Jew and Gentile into one man is implied in the crucifixion, that he "might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross" (v. 16). And the great "mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things" (Eph. 3. 9), but "hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (v. 5), is just this mystery given to Paul who is "less than the least of all saints" (v. 8): namely: "that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body" (v. 6). "The manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" is that this mystery shall be "made known through the church" (vv. 10–11).

How many other purposes the church has had to serve than this, its primary one! The body of Christ is one. The Israel of the Old Testament

had sought to identify itself with the people of God, rending the inhabited world in twain in order to monopolize for itself the life of God among men. "The Gentiles," Paul proclaimed as a revelation of God, "are fellow-members of the body." In the Epistle to the Romans he employed the gardener's imagery. The unbelief of Israel had led to the breaking off of branches. The faith of the Gentiles brought them into the tree by grafting. "But if some of the branches were broken off, and thou, being a wild olive, wast grafted in among them, and didst become partaker with them of the root of the fatness of the olive tree; glory not over the branches: but if thou gloriest, it is not thou that bearest the root, but the root thee" (Romans 11. 17–18). The Body of Christ is a tree of life, a vine whose branches live from the sap of a root springing out of the eternal life of God. More profound than we recognize probably is the Johannine description of the Logos who became flesh and dwelt among us. It was John who pictures Him as a vine. "Ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much

fruit" (John 15. 5). And it is in John that we have the words, "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me" (6. 57). Being grafted into the vine which is Christ, we live through the powers of His body in which all His people subsist. The church is a veritable tree of eternal life, and He who died on the tree thereby made it a source of blessing. For now through faith all mankind can be reconciled into one and derive its strength from Him. In the fellowship of the Supper, in the breaking of bread and sharing His cup, mankind may know the fruit of the vine and taste His kingdom.

The work of the church in the world thus is reconciliation, reconciliation of man to God and of man with man. It is the nature of sin to divide, to separate, to cause conflict and strife. Its marks are dissension, divorce, disease, disturbance. The nature of Christ is to unite, to bring together. Harmony and peace are His gifts. The function of the Christian is to heal, to bind to-

gether, to bring all life into the blood stream of the body of Christ.

Reconciliation means much more than finding one's own peace of mind. That is found in Him, when He creates us anew. But we are created unto "good works." We enter into a fellowship with Him which makes us feel the burdens He carries, the burden of the world's sin and woe. If we are united with Him in His death we know His anguish over the injustice, the cruelty, the hatred and vengeance, the poverty, the ignorance, of man everywhere. As He entered fully into the life of mankind to redeem it from within, His body of redemption can not escape out of society to keep itself pure. The church's work must be done in the centers of depravity, in the daily business of the world, in the control rooms of human thinking and action. No area of human activity is beyond or beneath the proclamation of the grace of God in Christ. For politics, or business, or art, or education, or recreation, or any other high or low place to say that Christ does not belong there, is but an admission that such an area is without God and

without hope. Christ, the truth of God, encompasses all human experience. Christians may not have learned His relationship to these areas, but their ignorance does not give these provinces independence. Rather, we need the more earnestly to strive to incorporate them into the tree of life without whose fruits they become dead or poisonous branches. Our failure as Christians has been that the cathedral built on the true cornerstone has not been wide and broad enough, deep and high enough, to house the life of the children of God. We have too hurriedly wanted to house Moses, Elijah, and Christ Himself in tabernacles too small and confining, tabernacles of our own planning and building.

Even the churches as we know them are less perfect structures than they have believed who have built these houses. The Body of Christ can not be confined within their walls. They are edifices bearing the marks of the architecture of the periods that gave them form. This does not make them less significant or true. They are, after all, the homes in which the people of God have been born and reared, have lived and hoped

and died, generation after generation. But one of the graces of the Christian character is humility. Christian humility preserves us from the presumption of claiming for our own family home the absoluteness which belongs only to Christ Himself. The Greek Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, and the communions of the Reformation, each hold heritages which none can deny are workings of the Risen Christ. Historically they are the results of peculiar conditions and unrepeated periods in which the Body of Christ produced the faith and hope of those peoples and times. The harm is done when the conditions and the forms of one place or historical period are absolutized into norms to which the whole church is subjected. The garments of Christ, his cradle or cross, or the life and thought of one or more of His followers, early or late, are made the objects of veneration and become the shrines at which Christians remain. But the Risen Christ can walk through the doors behind which His disciples think themselves isolated. It is the ascending Christ who commands them to go out into the lands of all the earth and wit-

ness among tribes of all languages and peoples of all cultures that His Word still creates new men, new communities, a new earth. It is only He that matters. All else is instrumental and secondary. The unity of Christendom is a unity in Christ. The Corpus Christianum is possible only through the Corpus Christi. That body may have many members, diverse ministries, varied forms of operation. To churches, as well as to individuals, these words of Paul still apply, which I translate from Greek words which are replete with ecumenical connotations: "To Him who has power over all things to do beyond what we ask or think by means of the power which operates in us, to Him be glory in the ecclesia and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of aeon upon aeon. Amen. So I who am bound (obs., not "free") in Christ call upon (same root as *ekklesia,* cf. *parakaleo* and *ekkaleo*) you to make your way worthily of the calling (again, *klesis*) by which you were called, in all humility and gentleness, patiently forbearing one another in love, exerting yourself to maintain the oneness of the Spirit linked together in peace: one

body and one Spirit, even as you were called in the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But to each and every one of us is grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Ephesians 3. 20–21; 4. 1–8).

Chapter VI

Peace on Earth and Good Will among Churches

However the angelic message may be translated it has, I believe, a bearing on a couple of the most vexing of contemporary issues. All the world is concerned these days about peace. Even the churches are being stirred to ask what they can do about it. Not that the Christian gospel through two thousand years has not sensed a connection between itself and peace, but war has come to mean something it never meant before and the church realizes that this Hydra-headed monster must be attacked in more than one place and one way. The church may not be able to

prevent war, but that is no excuse for saying nothing can be done by the church. If war comes despite everything the church does, Christians may at least have a clear conscience, which they can not have if they help make war inevitable by their complacency. The position of some that war must ever be with us because it is a punishment of human sin, and sin will always be here, is not only dangerous but deceptive. For usually the one holding that position fails to see that his own doubt and despair are a part of the very sin which brings such punishment, and he thus contributes to its inevitability. We have a right to despair of human achievement in attaining universal peace. But to claim that it is God's will that universal slaughter shall always be a condition of life on earth is a denial of God's grace and power. It is a mark of a generation of little faith, one that says, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth" (Matthew 25. 24–25).

Christ came to redeem the world from sin. I know that you might have a world full of sin even if it were warless, so that Christ's mission is not fulfilled by any arrangement which keeps the nations from each other's throats. I concede, too, that no man or nation is justified before God simply by works, even the works of creating a world without war. But if Christ fed and healed the multitudes to which He preached the gospel of the kingdom, and drove out the legions of demons which made men do beastly things, then it becomes His church not to do less. For there is a relationship between food and health and war and faith in God. Until we explore all the implications of that relationship we are falling short of proclaiming a gospel that redeems the world and a Christ who taketh away the sins of all mankind.

But the particular relationship in which I am presently interested is that between peace on earth and good will among the churches. For here we discover the amazing phenomenon that those who consider it to be their commission to proclaim the heavenly message of "peace

on earth" are not themselves an example to the world of mutual understanding and hearty good will. In humility and penitence, but in frankness and urgency, I want to examine if this is the Master's will, and if perchance Christians are contributing to the ill will which fills the earth with hate and death. Does peace on earth, more than we think, wait on good will among Christians? Do we need, maybe, to examine anew the foundations of our denominational attitudes and test their weight on the scales of God's purpose in the church?

Around one-fourth of the people who inhabit this war-torn earth give allegiance to the Church of Jesus Christ. It is conceivable that five hundred million Christians could do much toward maintaining world peace. At least by their faith they are supposedly committed to peace as a goal devoutly to be desired. These five hundred million are divided into three great camps: the Roman Catholic, with 338 million members; the Orthodox, 127 million; and the Protestant, with 135 million. With almost negligible exceptions these great groups (though together only one-

fourth of the earth's people) have nothing to do with each other. On the contrary, at many points they oppose each other, denounce each other, and would often wish the other out of the way.

Even the major groups are not peaceable in the sense that war can not occur among those within the group. Thus, Roman Catholic Italy did not hesitate to "stab in the back" Roman Catholic France. The Orthodox Balkan states go to war against each other. And Protestantism has not kept the nations of northern Europe which are predominantly Protestant from an endless series of wars with each other. But one might argue that political, economic, social causes have started all these conflicts, and that churches are not to be judged by what their countries do, since often the church members are not in control of policies and decisions.

It might still be expected that the 135 million Protestants could be characterized as men of good will toward each other, in strictly ecclesiastical matters. The expectation is not fulfilled. For not only do the major denominations have very little intercourse with other denomi-

nations, but within the denominations are groups which draw apart, claiming for themselves alone the name of true members. This is evident on a national scale. It is even more apparent in international relations among the churches. The difference between the Roman Pontiff in the Vatican, declaring that all others than his 338 million adherents are sheep without the fold, and the little pontiffs in denominations of 300 or so exclusive members, is a difference only in degree. In each case a standard has been set up which leaves millions of others outside of fellowship. The principles of unity and catholicity are forfeited and considered nonessential in the definition of the church.

Again, in humility we ask, "How have these things come to be?" Few, indeed, would answer that our common Lord and Master wants it that way. The pages of that Testament which He has left us witness to one who came that all might be one, even as He is one with the Father. They describe one who with infinite compassion established the sinner again in fellowship which had been broken, and who deprecated His dis-

ciples' antagonism to those who differed with them. And the great interpreter of the Mediator saw in the Cross the reconciliation of all mankind. The barriers which aforetime had divided peoples now no longer existed. One people was the result of the one Spirit, the one hope, the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism. The one call came from one God and Father of all, above all, through all, and in all. The arms of the Cross embraced all and His Body comprehended all. The unity of the family of God was as certain as the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Redemption is the buying back of slaves into a relationship of children with a father. In his home the fellowship of the family is regnant. Redemption can not be divorced from fellowship. All the terms of the redeemed are terms descriptive of friends, children, a people, a kingdom, a body. Sin separates. Grace unites. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you" (John 15. 12) They seek in vain, who search the Scriptures to justify the ignorance, the disdain, the exclusiveness

which have marked so much of the relationship between Christians.

It is to the pages of history rather than the gospel that we must go for an answer to the question, How did the divisions of Christians perpetuate themselves? Probably the Jewish sects had some influence. The antagonism between Pharisees and Sadducees, between Jews and Samaritans who "had no dealings" with each other, furnished examples to early Christians how to treat those with whom one did not agree. The congregation at Corinth knew all the pre-Christian forms of controversy. I suppose we shall have to admit simply and candidly that when the light of Christ comes into the heart it chases the dogs of war into corners whence they emerge whenever temptation calls them. The classic description of James fits Christians in whatever state of sanctification they may be:

For every kind of beasts and birds, of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed by mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is a restless evil, it is full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the

likeness of God: out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. . . . For where jealousy and faction are, there is confusion and every vile deed. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace. James 3. 7–10, 16–18.

But despite all the exhortations of the New Testament to the contrary, Christians from the beginning found themselves divided into parties and sects. Knowing how deep rooted were the superstitions against which Christian teaching had to contend, we would be naive to expect anything else. The white dress of the candidate for baptism may have covered a dark heart, and on conversion to Christ the pagan did not easily disarm himself of all carnal weapons.

The first centuries, however, limited the combatants in controversy to words. But when the government took over, a new thing happened. Now all the force at the command of the state could be enlisted on the side of one party and turned against the other. In the night in which

Jesus was betrayed, "behold, one of them that were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and smote the servant of the high priest and struck off his ear. Then saith Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26. 51–52). The fourth century marks the removal of the sword from the sheath, and from that time until today it has been used by some of those "which were with Jesus."

It is not too much to say that from Constantine on, the church itself was in the shadow of that Damocles sword. No one knows what might have been the development of the Christian church had it not been carried into this Babylonian captivity. In this captivity the gospel was transformed into a servant of political power. Yet, even in bondage, the gospel did great wonders. It civilized Europe and built a new life on the ruins of the Roman Empire. It gave heathen nations a new vision of God, His will and His kingdom. It gave hope, comfort, and courage to multitudes of men and women in ages

dark with misery. But the sword was lifted time and again. It was brandished by Charlemagne as he gave the Saxons their choice of baptism by water or by blood. It was held aloft as Europeans thronged on crusades not alone against infidel Saracens but against Greek Christians in Constantinople. It was dipped in the blood of the victims of the Inquisition. In those ages the church divided the dominion over the souls and bodies of mankind with the Empire. Pope and Emperor contended for supremacy. Men called the one spiritual, the other secular. In reality both were secular, and both wanted spiritual allegiance. Each wanted the blessing of the church and kept the gospel subservient to itself. The *Una Sancta* and the *Unum Imperium* each wielded the power of the sword to compel uniformity and conformity. The feast to which men were to be compelled to come was to an earthly banquet hall where the Pope sat at one end of the table and the Emperor at the other.

If the Middle Ages have taught us anything, it is that *neither one secular nor one spiritual*

organization can command the allegiance of one continent, let alone the world.

Another contending principle in that era, which might have preserved the unity of the Western church, was the conciliar theory. Had a genuine council been able to come together and had power to reform, the course of the European reformation would have been altered. The opposition of the Curia, in alliance with the Emperor, thwarted any such development. Eventually the repressed forces split the church wide open. The pretensions of the Papacy had earlier repelled the Eastern church. Now the Protestant Reformation divided the Western church into numerous parts. It is no coincidence merely that the dissolution of the Empire into national states and the division of the church into various communions came about the same time. Constantine had employed the church as a cement of his empire. The relationship was an unnatural one, and ultimately both church and state fell apart. "All the king's horses and all the pope's men couldn't put the thing together again."

One of the legacies inherited by the Protestant groups from the medieval church-state arrangement was—let us confess it—intolerance. The papal church insisted then, as it insists now, that only it possessed the whole truth. Those who refused to accept this dogma were anathema and heretics. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.* The Protestants refused assent to the dogma. But consciously or unconsciously they imitated their foe by setting up the same standard. Unless you conformed you were damned, at least you were not to be tolerated in the same church group. And in those cases where Protestants came to control the secular power, the sword was turned against dissent. *Cuius regio eius religio* was interpreted to mean that there could not be more than one religion in any territorial unit. Gradually this had to be modified, but Calvinists, Lutherans, Anglicans, all possessed somewhere regions where they became the state church and had privileges which were denied to nonconformists. Unity of the faith received very minor attention where considerations of expanding nationalism were primary.

It was natural that each fragment of the divided church should proclaim that it was the exemplar of the true church. In the period of closed boundaries there was not much intercourse across national lines, and the average Christian knew little of the church elsewhere. When you live by yourself, it does not make much difference what you think of yourself, or of others. In the era of freer communication opened by commerce and missions, it was inevitable that comparisons had to be made and questions were asked.

Above all in America, where no group had state protection and each had to stand on its own feet, the various communions have been compelled to adopt some attitude toward each other. Here we are free to think and free to speak. What we have thought and have said of each other here makes an interesting page in church history.

Probably not anywhere since the third century have Christians been so free as in the United States to consider the basis of an ecumenical church. Most of the churches have had to un-

learn some things. The colonists of Massachusetts Bay soon experienced the impossibility of a church-controlled commonwealth. The Congregationalists learned how to exist apart from it. The Revolution disestablished the Anglican Church. The American Episcopalians have done quite well without establishment. The Scotch Presbyterians have not been handicapped in setting up presbyteries in this country without government support. The Lutherans have managed to organize themselves without bishops and without consistories. Even the Greek and the Roman churches have accommodated themselves, though retaining ties with a hierarch across the seas. Least inhibited are the Methodists and Baptists, who have always thriven without benefit of state treasuries. In such an environment one might almost expect a new kind of Christian unity, and unique good will among the churches. Has this really been the result?

The answer is apparently in the negative. As far as Protestantism is concerned, the process has not stopped at divisions imported from Europe. In most cases American groups have not culti-

vated relationships with like groups in Europe, but developed quite independently. Beyond that they have subdivided into new groups and added some distinctively American variations to the already long list of Protestant denominations. However many and however small, they have claimed for themselves authority to be known as Christians, and, among themselves, as the most authentic Christians. Political motives in the Middle Ages kept before men the idea of the unity of the church. The tragedy of the modern period is that if unity has not been neglected altogether it has been perverted into a notion that unity is desirable only if everybody becomes a part of one's own organization. The doctrinal standards of independent groups have become universalized and are thought to justify the fragmentation of the church. How illogical this is, a moment's thought will reveal.

The Lutheran looks to the Augsburg Confession as the constitution of his denomination. But he does not take time to consider that for whole groups of other Christians the Augsburg Confession was never a reality. Scotch Presbyterians

hardly knew that confession existed, and how can you judge American Methodists if they know not the law of Lutheranism? Sometimes we speak as if all 135 million Proestants had been confronted by the Thirty-nine Articles, the Westminster Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Savoy Declaration, and had taken their choice. Were this the case, you might judge each by his rejection of all the others. But historically this never did, and never could, happen. Mostly each is ignorant of all the others. But instead of saying, "I don't know you, so I won't judge you," each has been inclined to assert, "I don't know you, so you are not a true Christian." Ignorance has conceived prejudice, and prejudice, when it is full grown, has brought forth intolerance.

There was a time when the denominations represented clearcut, full length statements of doctrinal faith and congregational discipline, the Calvinist in France and Holland, the Zwinglian in Switzerland, the Presbyterian in Scotland, the Anglican and Methodist in England, the Lutheran in Germany and Scandinavia. Those divisions could be maintained in those countries where one

communion predominated, and some *modus operandi* could painfully be arranged where several communions were permitted. But to say that all these isolated groups should have their counterparts in America and retain their meaning is unrealistic, and to contend that they should be reproduced in missionary areas is absurd. In the United States these lines of division have become so confused by merger, by duplication, by ambiguity of language, that they make no legible pattern. The Protestant church is not the sum of all these parts, for you can not add the parts. The parts are not comparable, nor are the parts as they used to be. Simple accuracy demands new definitions of the relationship of one communion to another.

Two alternatives are possible. One is to erase all lines of difference between the denominations and make one united church. This plan has its sincere advocates. I can not join them. For differences are present, and no good aim is served by ignoring or underestimating them. To exchange a situation where lines of demarcation are misleading for a situation where other lines

of differences are suppressed, is but to exchange one confusion for another. The medieval church tried that plan, and then had legions of soldiers to keep the peace. The result was revolutionary and tragic.

The other alternative is the one the medieval papacy opposed, namely, the conciliar. Each group shall have equal right to be heard, to state its case, to follow its program. In the process there may be a shifting of membership and a transformation of groups. Each Christian will have the opportunity of finding the body to which he belongs. Each group will learn to distinguish where distinctions exist, and to identify where there are not distinctions.

Out of the process may come new formations, while old ones cease to maintain themselves. Old names may go. It may be well that they do. In the realignment there will be more of clarity, of honesty, and less of traditional prejudice and bigotry than now plague our relations. Beneath the camouflage of custom, dress, language, Christians may find bonds of conviction which will increase fellowship.

The conciliar plan recognizes that each group or communion is not a self-sufficient unit, whatever may be its comprehension of Christian truth. At best it is a part, and the part has lost something essential if it be not in some sort of relationship to the other parts which make the whole. To say that the earthly part derives this advantage of the whole from being in communion with the heavenly, invisible church, while denying any sort of fellowship with other parts of the earthly church, is a form of deception, a kind of wisdom which the Apostle James claims does not come from above. The Apostle John, too, warns us, "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother [mark, not pagan, nor unbeliever, but *brother*] is in the darkness until now." There is a light of Christian fellowship in this world which they turn into darkness who refuse to deal with brethren of another persuasion. Only "with all the saints" can Christians "apprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth" of "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Ephesians 4). The apostle suggests that some of the facets of Christian

knowledge are above the intellectual formulations of any single body and are only to be grasped by a fellowship of the saints. Distorted fellowship or fellowship denied cuts us off from some of the fullness of God. Churches or denominations must realize that Christian faith implies an exercise of love toward the whole without which faith itself is only partial.

Love makes the whole. It is in this realm that the churches have been least successful. They have not taken seriously the apostolic assertion that "the greatest of these is love," and have wanted to stop at faith. Is it because faith is more subject to intellectual formulation? You can define faith, make a formula out of it, and force acceptance of it. You can make a man say, "yes" or "no," and if he says, "no," burn him at the stake, put him in a dungeon, or exclude him from society. You can not do that with love. You can teach faith, you have to live love. If it be Christian love, it oversteps the boundaries of our own and creates a relationship not there before. Was it not of Christian communions Paul was speaking when he de-

clared, "Love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked" (1 Corinthians 13)? It is questionable if all our vauntings of our separate faiths have been inspired by the love which faith is meant to confess.

I am not asking for any compromise of anyone's convictions. Nor do I demand that any shall change the faith they hold to as dearer than life itself. But I am saying that having confessed our faith is not enough. And if our faith has isolated us from other Christians, we are far indeed from the fullness of God. There must be some form in which Christians of varying persuasions can testify to a unity which is more fundamental than the differences that separate. If it is a sin of omission not to bear witness to the Christ who has saved us, then it is also a sin of omission for churches not to bear witness before the world that they have but one Christ. We call no man on earth "Father," either in English or in Latin, but we call those who confess Jesus Christ as Son of God and Saviour, our brethren. To do other-

wise is to violate the word of Christ. And if these be our brethren, the separate communions must, in some kind of council, say to all mankind, "We confess one Lord and Master, Jesus the Christ." Our historic heritage we need not dissipate. But our traditions must not obscure a loyalty that is greater than loyalty to ancestors. Churches are not worthy of the name if they do not embody good will to other churches.

To some earnest Christians the thought of fellowship with others who do not share all their belief seems to imply a compromise of their faith. To these, wider contacts appear possible only by a process of reducing doctrines to a common denominator which is less than the whole truth. There is, I think, in this attitude still something of a fear inherited from days when uniformity was enforced and persecution accompanied differences. We will be forced, so these Christians say, to give up something of our witness.

There are others who see in attempts at tolerance and forbearance only an indifference to faith itself. These hold that it is because men no longer believe very firmly that they can afford

to act as if nothing divided them. They may regret that deep convictions carry so much of emotion that one group has to repel the other. But they are unwilling to deal with others if it be at the price of adulterating one's own sincerity.

To both of these groups I would commend the method of the World Council of Churches. It is the method followed wherever true fellowship has been discovered across traditional lines of separation. It is the plan of mutual respect for each other and of honest facing of conscious differences. Many Christians have found common ground with friends in other denominations. They have sometimes been surprised to learn how wide the area of agreement really is, wide enough surely to acknowledge each other as Christian brethren. They see their differences in the light of their agreement. This is a very radical departure from the more common attitude of emphasizing differences so that agreements are entirely obscured. Out of a common devotion to Christ one can proceed to estimate the value and place of the points at which agreement is lacking. In reality this is calling for

nothing more than an honest appraisal of the whole situation. Indeed this is the quality of true catholicity, which means that which pertains to the whole. If our differences were really so fundamental that we had nothing in common, we could not both be Christians. Few are willing to assert that such is the case. But few have been willing to draw the consequences of the unity we possess as clearly as to describe the consequences of the unity we lack.

Our need is for another dimension in our Christian life. No less than anyone else we hold to the necessity of deep conviction, of high devotion. But we need a breadth which permits understanding of others and co-operation with them in spheres far wider than any yet discovered. As a Lutheran I may question the insistence of the Anglican on an espiscopally ordained ministry, but I can appreciate the order, the dignity and beauty of that church. I may not acquiesce in the Baptist's and the Congregationalist's emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the local parish, but I can admire the lay leadership those churches have produced. The Methodist

may seem to me sometime to place too much hope in revivalistic methods, but I wish for my own church something of his evangelistic fervor. I miss in the Presbyterian Church some of the elements of worship I set store by, but I would that my own church had the intellectual strength of that church. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body . . . and if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body?" No more can we today either say that we are not of the body or that we are all the body. "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?" The body is greater than any of its members. Our sin is not in our divisions. It is in the attitude which the divisions maintain against each other. "The eye can not say to the hand, I have no need of thee, or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." "God tempered the body together . . . that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." I am quoting, as you are aware, from Paul's First

Epistle to the Corinthians. Let me underline that the words are from the twelfth chapter, which leads into the hymn of love in chapter thirteen. Paul's message to the denominations of America is the same as it was to the sectarian groups in Corinth. No honest exegesis can relegate the "body" in these verses to an invisible, heavenly being. These passages refer to the good will which the apostle demands from churches of Christ here in visible, earthly cities. Willingly or unwillingly, those who confess Jesus as Lord are members one of another.

Good will among the churches does have some relationship to peace on earth among the nations. It is the church which is set in the world to be a ministry of reconciliation. Elaborate plans for a just and durable peace presuppose a common life of man which simply does not exist. And how can the church reconcile men of different nations when it has not reconciled its own children? Even within a country where citizens are at peace with one another, the church has failed to set an example of brotherliness consonant with its faith. Must it not then be converted to an atti-

tude which will restore something of the original description of Christians, "See how they love one another?" Christians can not hope to reconcile the broken fellowship of world Christianity as long as they fail to establish relationships of good will among each other.

The other area is that of international accord in the political life of nations. Peace on earth will be promoted by good will among the churches, if for no other reason than an international body of Christians must have an influence on political relationships between countries. We have too often and too much used the Christian church to bolster the barriers which have separated nations. We have made our Christianity a political weapon in the exploitation of other nations. To that extent Christians have involved the church in the promotion of war.

On the other hand foreign missions have been the great force to bring nations closer together. The church has in this field an incomparable power for the building up of good will among the peoples of the earth. Yet we have received more than we have given. Foreign missions have

reacted on the home church to force it out of its nationalistic, separatistic molds. The ecumenical movement is a child of world missions, and it may be true that this child shall lead the churches at home to a better understanding of each other.

Let the church demonstrate to the world the power of its inherent fellowship, and it will shake mountains both at home and abroad. We must find a new technique of relationships between communions, allowing each to testify of the truth it holds but bringing each into a larger whole which will be commensurate to the needs of an interdependent world. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" is a beatitude for our day. In this day as we see visions of the measurement of a temple of God to which all nations shall flow, it is still true that it will be wrought "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts" (Zechariah 4. 6). Still today we are invited into the "household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; in

whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2. 19–22).

NOTES

CHAPTER I

1. Quoted by G. BRADFORD in *D. L. Moody,* New York, 1928, p. 66.
2. *The Quest for Certainty,* New York, 1929, p. 278.
3. Sermon for Second Sunday in Lent. *History and Life of Doctor John Tauler,* London, p. 283. Trans. by Winkworth.
4. Cf. *Philosophical Fragments,* Princton, 1936, especially Chapter IV. Also, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* Princeton, 1941.

CHAPTER II

1. Cf. CHAS. N. COCHRAN, *Christianity and Classical Culture,* London, 1944.
2. *Preface to the New Testament, 1522,* in *Works of Martin Luther,* v. 6, Philadelphia, 1932, p. 442.
3. *Preface to the Old Testament,* in Ibid., p. 368.
4. WA IV 9. 28, 31. Quoted by HOLL, *Gesammelte Aufsätze I,* Tübingen, 1923, p. 291, note 6.
5. WA X 2, 23 "Von beiderlei gestalt des Sakraments zu nehmen," 1522.
6. WA XIII: 518–9.

CHAPTER III

1. "It is now clear that we have not yet got hold of any primary law, that all those laws at one time supposed to be primary are in reality statistical." A. J. EDDINGTON, *The Nature of the Physical World,* p. 98.
2. W. MACNEILE DIXON, *The Human Situation,* New York, 1938, p. 352.
3. G. AULÉN, *Spaningstjänst,* Stockholm, 1938, pp. 190–191. Cf. *Christus Victor,* translated from Swedish by A. G. Hebert, London, 1931.
4. T. BOHLIN, *Kierkegaards dogmatiska åskådning,* Stockholm, 1925, p. 14.

5. T. Bohlin, in *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalsskrift,* 1945, 2, p. 163.
6. In view of Jesus' words about the falling to earth of a sparrow (Matt. 10. 29) "without your Father," we can just as boldly say, "It is just as *little* a product," etc.
7. *Evolution: the Modern Synthesis,* Harper, 1942, p. 576.

CHAPTER IV

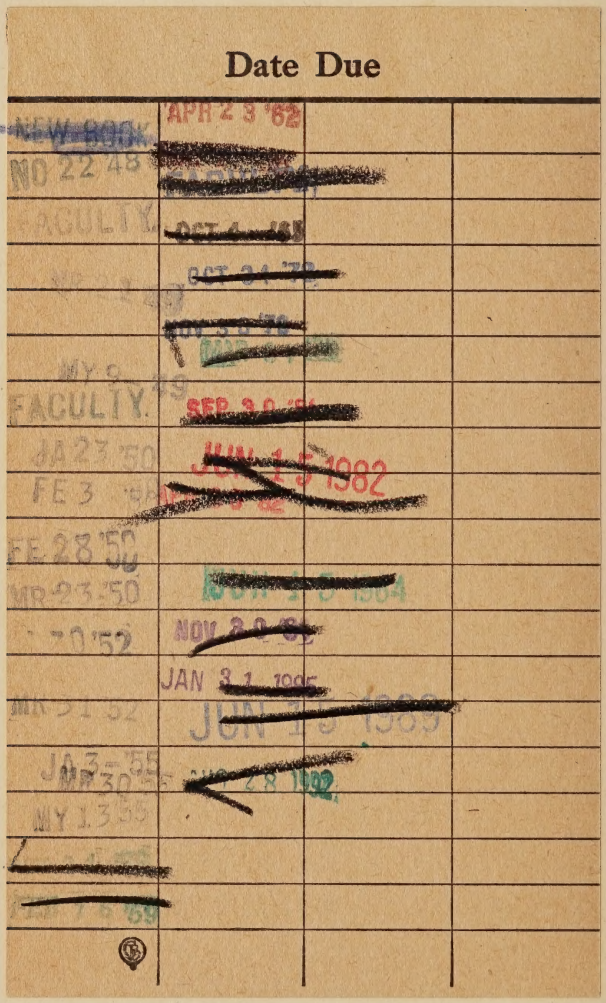
1. Einar Billing, *Our Calling,* translated from Swedish, pp. 7–8. Augustana, 1947. The translation is from *Vår kallelse,* 4th Ed. Stockholm, 1920.
2. *Challenge of Humanism,* New York, 1933, p. 31.
3. *Adv. Marcionem,* IV. 9.
4. G. Wingren, *Luthers lära om kallelsen,* Lund, 1942, p. 55.

CHAPTER V

1. Hugo Odeberg, *Den nutida individualismen,* p. 69 in *En bok om kyrkan av Svenska Teologer,* Lund, 1943.

CHAPTER VI

The major part of this chapter appeared in the Summer Number of *Christendom,* New York, 1945.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